THE NOVELS OF FRANK SWINNERTON

THE HAPPY FAMILY
ON THE STAIRCASE
THE CHASTE WIFE
SHOPS AND HOUSES
NOCTURNE
SEPTEMBER
COQUETTE

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FRANK SWINNERTON

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SEPTEMBER

SHOPS AND HOUSES

NOCTURNE

THE CHASTE WIFE

ON THE STAIRCASE

THE HAPPY FAMILY

THE CASEMENT

THE YOUNG IDEA

THE MERRY HEART

GEORGE GISSING
A Critical Study

R. L. STEVENSON
A Critical Study

COQUETTE

BY

FRANK SWINNERTON

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BOOK ONE: TOBY

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IT was Saturday night—a winter night in which the wind hummed through every draughty crevice between the windows and under the doors and down the chimneys. Outside, in the Hornsey Road, horse-omnibuses rattled by and the shops that were still open at eleven o'clock glistened with light. Up the road, at the butcher's just below the Plough public-house, a small crowd lingered, turning over scraps of meat, while the butcher himself, chanting "Lovely, lovely, lovely!" in a kind of ecstasy, plunged again into a fresh piece of meat the attractive legend, "Oh, mother, look! Three ha'pence a pound!" Just over the way, at the Supply Stores, they had begun to roll down the heavy shutter, hiding the bright windows, and leaving only a narrow doorway, through which light streamed and made rainbow colours on the pavement outside. The noise of the street was a racketting roar, hardly lower now than it had been all the evening. Sally crouched at the window of the first floor flat, looking down at the black roadway, and watching the stragglers from the Supply Stores.

In the flat above there was the sound of one who sang, vamping an accompaniment upon the piano and emphasising the simple time of his carol by a dully stamped foot upon the floor. His foot—making in soft slippers a dead "dump-dump-dump"—shook the ceiling of the

Mintos' flat. They could hear his dry voice huskily roaring, "There you are, there you are, there you ain't—ain't —ain't." They had heard it a thousand times, always with the familiar stamp. It was very gay. Old Perce, as he was called, was a carver in a City restaurant. It was he who received orders from the knowing; and in return for apparent tit-bits he received acknowledgments in coin—twopence or threepence a time. Therefore, when he reached home each evening, nicely cheery and about a quarter drunk, his first act after having tea was to withdraw from his pockets a paper bag or two—such as those supplied by banks for the carriage of silver—which he would empty of greasy coppers. He piled these coppers in mounds of twelve, and counted them over several times. He then smoked his pipe, went into his front room, and played, "There you are, there you are, there you ain't—ain't—ain't." Sally did not remember ever having heard him sing anything else. He was singing it now with customary gusto. Sally thought he must be a very rich man. Old Perce's wife, who let her practise on their piano, hinted as much. His wages were low, she said, but in a week his tips often came to three or four pounds. Three or four pounds! Whew! Sally's father only made thirty-five shillings in a week, everything included. Mrs. Perce told Sally many other things, which Sally shrewdly treasured in memory. It was well to know these things, Sally thought: any day they might be . . . useful. For a girl not yet seventeen, Sally had a strangely abundant sense of possible utilities. All old Perce's relatives were licensed victuallers, she had learned; and one day he too would take a "little 'ouse" and stand behind his own bar, instead of behind the counter of a city restaurant. Those would be days! "'Ave a trap and go out Sunday afternoons," Mrs. Perce said. "Oo, I wish you'd take me!" Sally cried. "Course I will!" answered Mrs.

Perce, with the greatest good-humour. Meanwhile old Perce had money out on loan. "I'd like," thought Sally, with considering eyes, "to have money out on loan. I will, too. One day. Why shouldn't I?"

Sally's mother, Mrs. Minto, was yawning by the small fire in the grate. She was a meagre little woman of about forty, tired and energetic. The Mintos' flat, although very bare, was very clean. Even when there was nothing to eat, there was water for scouring; and Mrs. Minto's hands were a sort of red-grey, hard and lined, all the little folds of the discoloured skin looking as if they had been bitten deep with acid that made them black. Her hair was very thin, and she drew it closely back from her forehead into a tiny knob like a bell-pull, leaving the brow high and dry as if the tide of hair had receded. Her lids were heavy over anxious eyes; her mouth was a bitter stroke across her face, under the small, inquiring nose. Her breast was flat, and her body bent through daily housework and too little care of herself, too little personal pride.

Sally resembled her mother. She too was small and thin. Her hair was pale brown, an insipid colour with a slight sandiness in it. Her cheeks were faintly freckled just under the eyes, and her nose, equally small and inquiring, had some freckles upon it too. Her eyelashes were light; her eyes a grey with splashes of amber. She was sitting huddled up near the window, breathing intently, looking out of it with eager, fascinated interest. The streets were full of lures. Outside, there was something which drew and absorbed her whole nature. The noise and the lights intoxicated her; the darkness was even more bewilderingly full of dangerous attractiveness. It was night, and night was the time when thrills came, when her heart beat closely with a sense of timid impudence, a sort of leashed daring. In darkness she brushed

hands against the hands of boys, and got into conversation with strangers, and felt herself romantically transfigured. They couldn't see how plain she was in the dark: she herself forgot it. In the dark she felt that she was bolder, with nobody to observe her and carry tales to her mother. Boys who wouldn't look at her in daylight followed her at night along dark streets. She was getting very experienced with boys. She could look after herself with them. Her eyes interestedly and appraisingly scanned every male, so that she came to know a great deal about the ways of men, although she never put her knowledge into words. She scrutinised them. In daylight her plainness was a help in that, because they did not take any notice of so insignificant a figure, and she absorbed every detail of the "fellows" she met, without having to do it under their return observation, by means of side-glances. This was a benefit, and at heart made her bolder, more ruthless.

At this moment, watching the people come out from the little door in the shutter of the Supply Stores, Sally ignored the silhouettes of women; but she peered quite intensely at those of the men. Men filled her thoughts. She was always choosing which men she liked, and which did not interest her, and which were weak and easily exploited. Or, if she were prevented from doing that, she could still look at them, seeing that they were men, and not women. The noise was good, the lights were good; but the darkness, such as there now was in the street below, in all the diminished labour of late traffic, was best of all. She saw the last customer at the Stores shown to the door by Mr. Beddow, the keeper of the shop; and the narrow door in the shutters closed. The last stream of light was abruptly cut off The face of the Stores was black. All the opposite side of the roadway was now black. There were no more silhouettes.

Mr. Beddow's cheeks were very fat, and when he smiled his eyes disappeared into slits just behind the top of his bulging cheeks. He wore a light frizzly beard. Once Mr. Beddow had given her a little bottle of acid-drops. All the acid-drops were gone now. She had given some of them to May Pearcey, who worked with her. They had eaten the remainder next day over their work, while Miss Jubb was out of the room; and the drops had made them thirsty and had given them hot, sweet breath. Funny she should remember it all so clearly.

May Pearcey and she were both learners at a small dressmaker's shop in a street off Holloway Road. They used to walk together along Grove Road in the mornings, and at dinner-time, and in the evenings. But the boys all looked at May, who was a big girl with rosy cheeks and eyes that were bold with many conquests. Sally only got the soppy ones. That was her luck. Sally wondered why a good-looking boy so often had a soppy one with him. She wasn't soppy herself. The boys thought she was; they never looked at her. But May picked up the good-looking ones, and Sally had to take what was left. She hated to see her boy always looking on at the others, at May, and never at herself; she hated to know that her boy didn't like the look of her, and that he couldn't think of anything to say to her; and didn't take the trouble to think very hard. It made Sally snap her teeth. One day, she reassured herself, it would be different. One day, they'd *know*.

Slowly she stretched, with her arms high above her head and her mouth stretched sideways in a yawn. Was mother asleep? She felt cramped and tired, and as she turned round to the light her eyes blinked at the contrast with the outer darkness.

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"Oo!" groaned Sally. "Tired!"

She yawned again, a yawn that ended in a breathless gasp. Mrs. Minto looked across the room at her.

"D'you want any supper?" she asked.

"Wotcher got? Peaches and cream, and a glass of champagne?"

Mrs. Minto wriggled her skinny shoulders and fingered her chin.

"Don't you be saucy to me, my gel. There's a bit of dry bread on the plate there. And half a glass of stout. You might think yourself lucky to get *that.*"

"Well, I s'pose I might. But somehow I don't. Dry bread! It's Saturday, ain't it? What I mean, pay-day."

There was a sour glance. Mrs. Minto sighed, and looked at the clock, frowning and wriggling her shoulders. It was a form of constant drill or shudder that affected her.

"Yes," she said. "And your father not home. Pubs are closed. Wonder where he is. Come on, Sally. Get your supper and get to bed. Sharp, now."

Sally rose to her feet and walked across the room. She cut a hunk of bread, and stood about munching it, little crumbs gathering upon her lips. You could see how thin she was when her arm was raised. Yet she made a few little dancing steps as she ate, and her face was not without a comical air of mischief. She was an urchin, and she looked it. She was unscrupulous, and a liar; but she knew a great deal for her years, and she never shrank from knowledge, because she was athirst for it. Knowledge which could be turned to account was her preoccupation. She stood looking at her mother, weighing her up, and in the midst of her daughterly contempt she had room for a little admiration also. They were not altogether

unlike; but Mrs. Minto had taken the wrong turning. She had married a drinker, and was a slave. Well, Sally had benefited by knowledge of that. She might marry a fool—probably would have to do so, as the wily ones took what they could get and went off on their own; but she would never marry so incautiously as her mother had done. Why should she? If one generation does not react to the follies of the earlier generation, and seek an exactly contrary evil, what becomes of progress? Sally had her wits. She thought they would never fail her.

As she sat down near her mother, they both heard a sudden slamming of the front door, two flights of stairs below. Their eyes flew in an exchanged glance that held trepidation. It was probably dad, and at this time on a Saturday night dad was usually the worse for wear. Both listened. There was a heavy step. Then the sound of voices—a woman's raised voice, and dad's. It was evidently a row. Sally ran to the door, and they listened to what was passing. Down the half-lighted stairway they could just discern two figures, faintly outlined in the wavering flutter of gas. Obviously dad was drunk, for he was haranguing a rather hysterical Mrs. Clancy, who stood at the foot of the stairs and shouted after him. She said that he was drunk, that he ought not to come in at that time of night stumbling about like an ostrich, that decent people liked a little quiet, if he pleased. Mr. Minto said he would come in when he chose, and in what state he preferred. He was not obliged to consult such an indiscriminate mother as Mrs. Clancy, and he would not do it. Far from it. Far from it. He stood for liberty. He had as good a right to the staircase as anybody else in the house. More right, in fact. Let her bring out Mr. Clancy if she wanted a fight. . . . He then proceeded to the top of the first flight of stairs. He climbed with difficulty, missing a stair once in a while, and breathing

hard. He was pursued by an outcry. A third voice was heard—that of Mr. Clancy. It was directed at first entirely to the woman, and begged her to come back into the kitchen. They could see her arm caught by Mr. Clancy, from whom she freed herself by a blow. There was a pause. But Mrs. Clancy broke out afresh. She was beyond control, passionately shrill, and quite wildly resentful of what had been said and done in her despite.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Mrs. Minto, with inadequate petulance. She stepped out on to the landing, fingering her mouth. Sally tiptoed after, hardly moved, but intensely curious. She was grinning, but nervously and with contempt of the row. "Joe!" called Mrs. Minto. "Joe! Come upstairs. Don't get quarrelling like that. Ought to be ashamed of yourself. Come upstairs!" She looked over the rails at her husband, like a sparrow on a twig. He was a flight below. "Come up here!"

There was a fresh outburst from Mrs. Clancy.

"You put your 'usband to bed, Mrs. Minto. Pore woman! Pore soul! Fancy 'aving a thing like that for a 'usband! 'Usband, indeed! A great noisy drunkard, a great beastly elephant, boozing all his money away. Drunken fool, stamping about. . . ."

"You shut your mouth!" bawled dad, thickly. "You shut your mouth. See? When I want . . . You shut your bloody jaw. See?"

"Joe!" called Mrs. Minto, urgently, a mean little slip peering over the bannisters.

"Joe!" mimicked Mrs. Clancy. "You take him to bed, Mrs. Minto. Take his boots off. He's not safe. He's a danger, that's what he is. I shall tell the police, Mr. Minto. It's got to come. You got to stop it. I shall tell the police. I will, I swear it. . . ."

Mr. Minto retorted. His retort provoked Mrs. Clancy to rebuke. The quarrel was suddenly intensified. It be-

came rougher. Even Sally was excited, and her hands were clasped together. Mr. Minto lost his temper. He became mad. A fierce brutality seized him in its unmanageable grip. They heard him give a kind of frenzied cry of passion, saw him raise his hands, heard a hurried scuffle at the foot of the stairs, where the Clancys, both alarmed, drew back towards their room. And then the rattle of an arm against a rail, a slither, a bumping, and a low thud. Dad, overbalancing in his rage, had pitched and fallen headlong down the stairs. Mrs. Minto and Sally set up a thin screaming. The gas flickered and burned steadily again. A shriek came from Mrs. Clancy. It was repeated. Mr. Minto lay quite still in a confused heap in the lower passage.

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Dad was dead. It was the end of that stage in Sally's life. After the funeral, Sally and her mother were quite without money. Everything was so wretched and unforeseen that the two were lost in this miserable new aspect of poverty and improvidence. For a time Mrs. Perce was good to them, and Mrs. Clancy would have been the same if Mrs. Minto had not stared through her as through a pane of glass. But when that was done, and the funeral was over, they had nothing. Together they sat in their bare room above the noisy traffic of Hornsey Road, not speaking much, but all the time turning and turning in their heads all possible ways of making money. In another two or three years Sally might have earned more; but she was not now much above sixteen, and at sixteen, in the dressmaking, one does not earn a living. And while at first they thought that Mrs. Minto might get needlework to do, with which Sally could help, they found this out of the question. Mrs. Minto's eyes were

weak, and she could not keep her seams straight. The machine they had was ricketty. Sewing, for her, was impossible. For a few days she was stunned with the new demand for which she was unprepared. She was nerveless. It made Sally sick to watch her mother and to realise from the vacancy which so soon appeared upon her face that memory and a kind of futile pondering had robbed her brains of activity. With a bitter sense of grudge against life, a tightening of lips already thin, and a narrowing of eyes already discomfitingly merciless, Sally savagely told herself that she had to do everything alone. It was she who must save the situation. The arrogant grasp of this fact made a great impression upon her mind and her character. Henceforward she no longer dreamed about men, but was alert in her intention to make everything her tool, and everybody. From a young girl she had been converted into an unscrupulous taker from all. The death of her father was a blow which had suddenly drawn together all those vague determinations which had lain concealed. There was nothing except dangerous theft from which her mind shrank. Looking afresh at her mother, she felt stirred by a new impatience, and a succeeding indifferent contempt. Love had been killed, and from now onwards she would play for her own hand. Small teeth met with a snap. Her thin lips were drawn back. Mrs. Minto shrank from the strange venomous snarl which she saw disfiguring Sally's face.

It was as though Sally felt trapped. Everything had been spoilt by this unexpected happening, and Sally's unconscious helplessness revealed. It was a blow to her vanity, a douche to her crude romanticism. She had felt cramped and irritable before; but now she was made to realise how little she had with which to fight against calamity and the encroachments of others. Compared with this new danger, of starvation or slavery, all old dis-

comforts were shown to have been trivial, because they had been accidents in a life which, however rough and ugly, had been at least absorbed in plans for enjoyment. Now plans for enjoyment gave place to expedients for self-protection. Sally was indeed fierce and resentful. It was with animosity that she put together the few sticks of rubbish which remained to them and helped her mother to rearrange these things in a single room which they had taken on the other side of Holloway Road. No more for them the delights of Hornsey Road and three rooms; but the confined space surrounded by these four dingy walls. What wonder that Sally was desperate for fresh air, for escape, and ran out of doors as soon as she could wriggle free! What wonder that she walked quickly about the dark streets! Tears came to her eyes, and with clenched fists she secretly whimpered in this new angry despair. Of what avail? She was alone, and the streets were dark; and behind her lay that one room, gloomy and wretched, with a speechless ruminating mother for solitary welcome; and no hope . . . no hope.

The roads she now so wildly trod were familiar ground to Sally. They were all gravelled roads, upon which in the evenings boys and girls cycled and flirted, and in which on Saturdays and after school hours children bowled their hoops and played together. As the darkness grew, the roads were more deserted, for the children were in bed, and the boys and girls were not allowed out. Then appeared young men and girls of slightly greater age and of a different class, the girls walking two by two, the young men likewise. The young men cleared their throats, the girls peeped and a little raised their voices, a relation was established, and still the pairs continued to promenade, safe in couples, and relishing the thought that they were enjoying stolen acquaintance. Sally knew the whole thing through and through. She had walked so with

May. She had tried to talk to the boys and found them soppy, and herself soppy, and everything soppy. She had wanted more and more excitement, and all this strolling and holding hands in the dark, and snatching them away, and running, and being caught, was tame to her eager longing for greater adventure. And now she walked rapidly about the roads, her eyes full of despair, her heart heavy, her brain active and contemptuous. She knew her own cleverness. She knew it too well. And it was smarting now at being proved such an ignominiously valueless possession. She might be clever, she might have brains enough to despise May Pearcey; but she had not the power to make a living. She must still pinch and starve beside her mother. Trapped! Trapped!

It was a matter of weeks, this mood of indignant despair, of baffled powerlessness in face of reality. And each night, after such a lonely walk, in such a vehement mood, Sally would return to the miserable room in which for the present she was to spend her life. It was at the back of the house, on the second floor, and there was another floor above. The room had a stained ceiling and a wallpaper that had discoloured in streaks. The original pattern had been of small flowers on a pseudo-primrose background. Now all was merged in a general stagnation of Cambridge blue and coffee colour. Mrs. Minto had carefully put the washstand beneath a patch that had been washed nearly white by splashes; and Sally had insisted that it should stand in another part of the room. "But that's where a washstand's stood before," wailed Mrs. Minto. "That's *why*," explained Sally, brutally. "Put the chest-of-drawers there. *I* don't want to splash exactly where other people have splashed. Not likely! The place ought to have been papered new."

When their bed and the washstand and a table and the chairs and chest-of-drawers were in there was not much

else to arrange. Nor was there room for very much, because the bed took up about a quarter of the space. The Mintos had no pictures. They thus anticipated the best modern taste. But the consequence was that if Sally happened to be irritable she saw the wallpaper, and the wallpaper drove her crazy. It was a constant exasperation to her. Her extremely good taste was beginning to bud, and wallpaper is as vital an æsthetic test as any other. She had not yet the power or the knowledge to dress effectively, but she was already learning intuitively such things as harmony and colour-values. She gave an eye to neatness and cleanliness, and knew how to riddle the costumes of girls of her own class, beginning with May Pearcey. She also was becoming aware of all Miss Jubb's deficiencies. Higher than her own class she could not well go, because she never had opportunities for seeing well-dressed women. It was so much the Minto habit to rise late on Sundays, to sit about during the afternoon, and to go out only when other people were generally indoors, that Sundays were wasted days. Moreover, Sally had not in the past thought much of other girls. She had thought only of boys. Even her new spruceness was a comparatively recent manifestation. She was growing.

She was growing so fast that her old knowledges had been undermined. She felt raw. She felt merely exasperated with the past, so that she desired only to forget it. All she had seemed to know and to relish had become insipid to Sally. She was chafing at her new position, and was unconsciously looking round and round her, bewildered, for a new path to follow. She could no longer take the old silly pleasure in hearing of May's fresh conquests, which gave May such monotonous delight. She abandoned "boys," and was rewarded for her emancipation by May's indignant sniffs at her loss of spirit. May was

driven to take a new comrade, a girl prettier than Sally, and therefore more of a rival. So May was equally dissatisfied with the present position. She had lost ground, and some of her victories were invented. Nellie Cavendish had a sharp tongue, and that helped May; but Nellie was less coarsely confident than May, and annexed the boys by means of her demureness in face of double meanings. May could not refrain from turning away to hide a burst of laughter. That gave Nellie an advantage, and May secretly longed to hunt once more with Sally. When the old times could not be recaptured, May sneered in self-defence. The two girls did not chatter over their work now when they were left alone. They became hostile, each aggrieved, and both mutually contemptuous. Sally kept to her stitching, and glowered. May thought to herself. Sally abruptly announced the soppiness of May's continued exploits. When asked by her mother if she were not going out with May, Sally returned the cold answer that May was soft, and continued to walk alone, much disturbed, and privately indignant that her mother should be so blind as to ignore the alteration that had come about. She was lonely and wretched, spoiling for any mischief that might offer.

Material for the use of such desperation never lacks. It arose naturally. Toby came into her life.

Toby was a young man of about twenty years of age, who lived in the house. She caught sight of him one night as she returned home, for he was running down the stairs as she went up them. He was of middle height, very dark and rather stoutly built; and he wore a cap. That was all she noticed at their first encounter, since the stairs were dark: that, and the fact that he did not draw to one side as they met. The contact filled her mind with sudden interest. She thought about him as she munched her supper, and wondered what he was really like. She

wreathed around Toby quite a host of guesses—not very deep or vivid, but sufficiently so to make her think of him still as she undressed and slipped into bed beside her mother. Her last thought before sleep came was a faint enjoyment of the knowledge that a young man lived in the same house. It was the faintest of thoughts, due solely to her restlessness; but in the gloom she was conscious of him and of the conviction that they would meet again upon the stairs. For that time this was as far as speculation could carry her. Sally did not think of herself at all—only that there was a young man, and that she should see him again. The rest of her attention was absorbed in the endeavour to remember all she had noticed of his appearance in that hasty meeting. She had seen enough to be sure of recognising him again with the house as associative background. That was all. Knowing it, she feel asleep, and dreamed of a sudden gift of beauty and attractiveness.

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For several days Sally did not see the young man, and so she half forgot him, lost him in the mixture of her more pressing preoccupations. Every morning she rose at eight o'clock, after her mother had left the house for her first situation, and then, breakfasting slowly, she had just time to reach Miss Jubb's by nine. She did not like Miss Jubb, who was a thin-faced and fussy person who always wore a grey pinafore and felt that her untidy grey hair looked as though it might hint a sorrow rather than betray advancing years. Miss Jubb was full of the futile vanity of the elderly spinster, her mouth full of pins, and her head full of paper patterns. She lived with her mother on two floors of an old house, and one of the downstairs rooms was used on Sundays for sitting in and during the week for trying on. The work she did never

suggested anything of the enormous pains Miss Jubb took in fitting, in fastening pins and cutting out. She was incurably a bad dressmaker; but she gave her clients the impression that she knew her business. This was because she was so careful, and because they knew no better than she did what women may and may not wear with propriety. The backs of all skirts coming from Miss Jubb drooped lower than the fronts. Her bodices always went wrong upon the shoulders. She was great on tucks. But she was cheap, and she was Sybil-like in her mysterious assurance. So she supported herself and her mother; while May and Sally did the rough basting and all sorts of odd jobs in the room behind the parlour. Here were the big cutting-out table, the treadled sewing machine, three or four chairs, many fragments of material, several half-made garments, and, upon the walls, a number of coloured prints from fashion papers. In such surroundings Sally spent her days. She ate her lunch at twelve o'clock, and had her tea at four. And as her fingers worked, or her feet occasionally by special permission propelled the sewing machine, she thought of the future and planned to get into the West End.

It was the West End that now lured her. If only she could get into the West End all her troubles would be wiped away at once, she felt. She could possibly make more money there; but even if she did not succeed in that aim she would still be in the running for better work. That she could do better work she never doubted. And she knew that as long as she was with Miss Jubb she would never do anything at all. Some instinct told her that. She knew it. She knew it as clearly as if she had surveyed the future from above. It was not that she was suddenly wise; but only that ambition had come into her consciousness. The blow she had received by her father's death had struck deep into her character. She

had now to make something of her life, or starve. With a quick circle of thought she imagined her mother dead. What would happen then? What chance had she? Only vaguely did Sally glimpse the possibilities. She knew she could not keep herself. She had one aunt—her mother's sister—with two boy children who were both younger than Sally; but Aunt Emmy had a rough time herself, and could hardly be a help. Sally saw clearly enough that she had to fight alone. Very well, if she had to fight alone she would do it, and fight hard. As she scowled, it became evident that Sally would in this fight unscrupulously use every weapon that she could seize. She would not shrink from anything that put opportunity into her head. She was already hardened—a kind of hardening on the surface, or in strata, which left curious soft places in her nature, streaks of good and layers and patches of armour and grit and callous cruelty. Above all, she was determined upon having money. Money was the essential thing. Money meant safety. And safety, when starvation threatens, becomes the one imperious if ignominious ideal. Once one has known physical hunger, no act is inconceivable as a means of averting the risk of a similar experience.

Thus Sally's thoughts ran, not coherently or explicitly, but in vehement revolts and resolves. Thus she ruminated, while Miss Jubb was out of the room or had her attention so distracted that she could not observe an idle apprentice. When Miss Jubb came back to the room or to supervision work had a little to be hurried, so that she might not find occasion for complaint. For Miss Jubb had a sharp tongue, and although she took the pins out of her mouth before she talked she showed that they had left their influence upon her tongue, which was sharp to a fault. And there, across the room, was the rosy-cheeked May Pearcey, so silly, so incapable of more than momen-

tary resentment, that she was always forgetting that Sally and she no longer spoke, but was always trying to encourage Sally into a return to their former relation. Sometimes Sally would glower across at May, bitterly hating her and riddling her plumpness and folly with the keen eye of malice. May, unconscious of the scrutiny, would go on with her work, self-satisfied, much coarser and more physical in her appetites than Sally, still in spite of all the rebuffs she had received grinning about her boys and what they had said and what they had meant. . . .

"Oo, he *is* awful!" she would burst out to Sally. "The things he said. I dint half blush."

May had enjoyed his boldness, it seemed. She told Sally what he had said. She told her things and things in the irresistible splurge of the silly girl whose mind is full of adolescent impurity. Well, Sally knew all that. She knew all the things that boys said; and a few more things she had noticed and thought for herself. She was not a prude. May didn't know anything that Sally did not know; but she talked about it. Sally did not talk. Her sexual knowledges, so far as they went, were as close and searching as a small-tooth comb, and collected as much that was undesirable. She despised May. May was a fool. She was soppy, talking about all these things as if they were new marvels, when they were as old as the hills and as old as the crude coquetries of boys and girls. May was the soppiest girl in Holloway. Yet the boys liked her for her plump face and arms and legs, and her red cheeks, and her self-conscious laugh, and her eyes that held guilt and evil and general silliness and vanity. The boys liked May. They did not like Sally. She was too small and sandy; too obviously critical and contemptuous in face of their small stock of talk, and too greedy of their poor and pompously-displayed schemes for economical entertainment. Sally's teeth showed like the teeth of

a cat, very small and sharp, emblems of her nature. Conceit took firmer root in her heart because of her contempt for May and her inevitable suppressions of pain and resentment in face of neglect, as well as her suppressions of knowledge gained by a mental process so quick that May could never have had the smallest notion of it. Sally became secret, and her determination was made more emphatic. She began to study her face, and her body. One day her mother found her naked in front of a mirror, twisting herself so that she could see the poise of her figure. It was a pretty figure, if underdeveloped, and from that time of thorough examination onwards Sally never had the smallest doubt of her own attractiveness and its principal constituents. Only her face was wrong, she felt with bitter chagrin; her face and her hair. If her face were fatter and less freckled, and if her hair were not so sandy and pale, she would be pretty. Really pretty. Pretty enough to make a man go silly. Well, such things could be cured, couldn't they? Or, if not cured, then at least improved. . . . That was a notion that dwelt constantly in Sally's thoughts.

V

The point was, that she must have actual experience in rousing men. It was not that she had determined upon marriage as a way out of her present difficulties. At the back of her mind, perhaps, was always the knowledge that she must get a man to work for her; but this never became an obsession. She was simply a growing girl, hungry for experience, and at the outset hampered by circumstance. Unless something happened to her, Sally was doomed to poverty and suffering. Therefore, full of raw confidence, she was determined that she should be the heroine of her own romance. Her im-

pulse was not to give, but to take. She did not long to be the loving help of a good man, but was ever craftily bent upon exploiting the weaker sides of those she met, for the furtherance of her own ends.

It was several days before she met Toby again; but she waited with a kind of patience wholly in keeping with the rest of her nature. She always expected to meet him upon the stairs, and never did so. In the streets she looked for him. Nights, however, were dark, and Toby apparently elusive. But one evening she was running down the three steps at the front door just as he arrived home. With a quick breath she ventured a "good evening." When he answered, she was filled with a pleasure which she would have found it hard to explain. "Evening," said Toby, surlily, and passed on. Sally gave a small grimace, a faint jerk of the head. That was done. A few more days passed. Still in the darkness she saw him a third time, now as she closed the door of the room, while Toby hurried to the floor above. By questions, she had found out that he lived exactly over them, and that his aunt had the room next to his, in the front of the house. This aunt she never saw, as she was very exclusive, and did not associate at all with her neighbours. Toby's surname she could not learn; but his aunt was called Mrs. Tapping. The aunt had an annuity. Toby worked somewhere in the neighbourhood; and Sally soon discovered the times of his departure and return. She knew these so well that she could have told you to the minute when his foot might be expected upon the stairs. If he happened to be late she could have remarked upon it to her mother, if she had been in the habit of telling her mother anything at all.

Later, when they had been in the house about three weeks, she had a triumph. She was going out one eve-

ning, and was barely down the first two or three stairs when she heard him running behind her. He was forced to pull up, and, from a peep, she saw that he was still half a flight above. Their progress from that instant coincided. They reached the front door almost at the same time. She left it open, and as Toby came out she turned and smiled "good evening." He replied. Sally followed with "Beautiful, isn't it!" and then went slowly towards Tollington Park. Would he follow? She was almost breathless, her eyes downcast, her ears strained. He did not follow. Sally frowned. A sneer came to her lips. Then a pensiveness succeeded, and resolve became fixed. All right; he did not follow. He was a man. All the more worthy of her address.

Moreover, she had noticed him more clearly than ever before, because the gas in the hall had lighted his face as she turned upon the threshold. He was strong, and she adored strength. He was broad and muscular and dark. He had dark eyes under heavy brows. His age she supposed to be about twenty or slightly above. As she recollected these details Sally's face became inscrutable. All the same, her walk had lost its savour, and she returned home earlier than usual. How miserable it was that she had no other girl of her own age to go about with. Boys always went in twos. So did girls. The one gave the other courage. Yet Sally was done with May. May was soppy. She did not, in thinking this, do anything but envy May; but all the same she knew that Toby's solitariness matched her own. It was an augury. She lay awake until he came home, listening to her mother breathing; and then, in a few minutes, heard eleven o'clock strike.

vi

The next time this happened, and they met so definitely, Toby looked sharply at her. Sally did nothing, but paused an instant. He followed her with his eyes. Then, he stepped to her side. It was the moment and Sally stopped sharply, shrinking a little from him.

"Going out alone?" Toby said. "Mind if I come too?" He walked beside her. "I mean . . . live in the same house."

Oh, he had plenty of assurance.

"All right; you can come," Sally vouchsafed. She was not going to show eagerness; but she was thrilling with excitement. She moistened her lips, her nostrils pinched and her eyes suddenly shrewd. She felt her heart beating terribly in her breast, and was half the calculating victor and half a genuinely shrinking young girl engaged in her first serious exploit.

For a few moments both Toby and Sally were silent. Everything depended upon the establishment of some instant connection between them, for otherwise the nerve of both might fail, and a fiasco result. Toby's step hesitated, as though he was beset by an impulse to leave her. Sally shot a quick glance. He was wavering, and must be held.

"Nice night, isn't it?" she remarked, in a ladylike way.

The inclination to fly was checked. Toby remained by her side. They walked together about the streets for an hour, he smoking cigarette after cheap cigarette, and every now and then saying something that was nothing. He was not a good talker. He could not express himself, but said "er" between words, and moved his hands. Partly it was nervousness. Sally often grinned at knowledge of this and of his bad way of speaking, which

made him sometimes appear almost loutish. But behind every roughness there lay a hidden strength that she was ready to worship. She walked beside him with steps quicker than his own, but a good swing; exulting in their power to walk in unison, a thin little figure beside his stoutness, her large black straw hat hiding her every expression except when she tilted up her head and in the light of a street lamp showed a tiny white face. Toby slouched along, one hand sometimes in a trouser pocket, but more often with both hands in restless motion. She could hear him: "I mean to say . . . these yobs go about . . . penn'orth of chocolates and a drink at the fountain. That's all the dinner they get. Wear a tiddy little bowler hat and never brush their boots . . . Office boys, they are; and call 'emselves junior clurks. And what's it come to? I mean to say . . . I'd rather work with my hands, like a man. . . . What's the matter with a little dirt? Comes off, doesn't it?"

"Oo . . . yes . . ." sighed Sally, admiringly.

At last, pursuing this theme, Toby told her an anecdote about one of the other fellows at his work. Sally listened with a breathless interest that was only half-feigned. She wanted him to think she understood. She wanted him to like her. She even wanted to sympathise. It was such a mixture of feelings she had—some good, some mischievous and deliberate. All her vanities were involved. Her nerves were taut with the strain of such a show of absorption, while her mind ran on at top speed. She asked pseudo-timid questions, just to show her interest and her cleverness, and to encourage Toby to keep on telling her things that threw light upon himself and his likes and dislikes. She walked delicately, stifled yawns, interjected "fancy" and "there" as if she understood all he said. She beguiled him. And all the

time, under the design, her heart was soft towards him, soft and admiring.

They walked along the darkened streets at a slow pace, and the passers were few. Once or twice they encountered hushed couples, sometimes laughing groups. Always Sally glanced stealthily, and summed up those whom they saw; and had a tail glance for Toby. He appeared to ignore everything, and slouched along at her side, as he must have done when alone, with his head lowered. She could not make him out. In some ways he was so self-confident, in others so much as though he had never looked at a girl before. Did he know girls? Did he know what they were like? What a mystery—a delicious mystery! He wasn't soppy, yet he hardly looked at her. Funny . . . funny! So she mused; continuing to give his talk quite half her attention.

At last ten o'clock struck, and, although both wanted to stay out longer, Sally was prudent and firm. She said "mother would wonder what had happened," and laughed a little in her excitement, at the innuendo, and in encouraging flattery. "*Must* go," she added, lingering. So Toby took her back to the corner of their road, it being a strict unspoken covenant that they should not enter the house together, in case they should be seen. There was no handshake; but Sally had the satisfaction of seeing Toby awkwardly move the peak of his cap in parting. That was ever so good, she thought. Her hard scrutiny of his manner found as yet no cause for suspicion, but only for a renewal of her curiosity concerning him. Toby showed no sign of any feeling beyond satisfaction with her, and this was an irresistible flattery. She ran in, full of excitement.

vii

What was the truth about him? Sally's thoughts bit into her observation with intense gusto. She turned and twisted all her impressions during a couple of wakeful hours; and she remained full of glee. What a piece of luck. Toby! Toby, Toby, Toby! How quickly her mind worked! It was like acid, testing and comparing; and yet its action was soft and caressing when she remembered his figure and his voice—some of the little gestures, some turns of speech, his sturdy contempt for what he called "yobs," which she discovered to be the word "boys" spelt in an unfamiliar way. Those were the things she loved. The rest she had exploited. The mixture of pleasure and tactics filled her with delicious dread and hunger.

When the following evening came, Sally deliberately waited until she heard Toby go out. Only after a delay of five minutes did she put on her hat and coat in opposition to her mother's command. What was mother? There was a faint flush on Sally's cheeks, and a new sparkle in her eyes. She was engaged upon an adventure. She dallied as she went down the stairs. At the door she checked herself once more. What if he were not there? To herself she said that she would not mind; but that was a lie which she told to her wits. Her heart gave a different message.

How dark it was! At first Sally could see nothing. The moon, if there was one, hid itself behind black clouds. Only specks of light came from street lamps and between the slats of Venetian blinds. A wind hustled about, blowing up for rain, and uncomfortably draughty. As Sally stood on the step the door slammed behind her, and she heard a rattling run all through the house, a banging of other doors and trembling of window-panes.

And then, as she lowered her head to meet the dusty breeze, she felt Toby beside her, at her elbow, expectant. Sally gave a start and a cry, for he had been so silent in the midst of all these alarms as to come unexpectedly.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed coquettishly. "Thought you'd gone out *long* ago!"

Toby gave a sort of half-confused laughing grunt.

"Hours ago I went out," he said, very close to her, deliciously bold.

"Didn't think you'd remember . . . I didn't *say* I'd come . . . Have you been waiting?" Sally sounded very nearly affected in her unplanned speech. Toby answered with a sort of off-hand nonchalance.

"Only a minute. That's all right. I was afraid you weren't coming." Afraid! What a lovely word! He continued, with his hand quickly at her elbow: "Shall we go round Fairmead?"

When he spoke as he was doing now, Toby's rough voice dropped to a low note that he believed to be gentle. It was in fact still vibrant; but Sally liked everything about his tone and his manner. It made her feel that he was a man; and manliness was everything to her. She longed while she was with him to meet May . . . to show her . . . It would have given Sally fierce joy. For the rest, she was content. He was by her side. Their arms touched from time to time. When the wind blew extra strong, she clutched him, and they stood together to resist the onset. And at every touch Sally had fresh sense of strength and adventure.

"What you been doing today?" she asked, as talk flagged. He told her. He told her a great deal more about himself, and about his aunt. He had had the most marvellous adventures. Sally could not believe them all; but she was charmed by the narrative. Toby

talked more freely. He hesitated less, and was more confident. Sally felt sure he must have known other girls. You didn't talk like that if you were new to it. She was again curious. Once she almost blurted out the question; but she stayed the words in time. It would have been a mistake to ask anything at this stage. It would have seemed possessive. It might have alarmed him. Anyway, she thought, if he *has,* what does that matter? To her it was an added pleasure, that he *might* be wise and experienced. It was a greater flattery; it called for greater resource in herself.

Once, when they had stopped and Sally had stood close to him so that he might light a fresh cigarette under the shelter of her body, Toby blew forth a puff of smoke and put his arm round her. Very coolly did Sally free herself, perfectly mistress of the situation; but she liked him the better for his boldness. It was the sort of thing she had dreamed—a lover who was ardent, a lover who had to be repelled, so that the delight of ultimate surrender should be fully savoured. Was he a lover? Sally shivered. The attempt and the rebuff made them more intimate, as though an understanding had been reached between them. They walked along elbow to elbow, at first silent, and then talking freely, both in good-humor and with continued interest. In the safe darkness Sally's eyes glistened. The very faintest smile made her mouth enigmatic. Already she carried herself with fresh assurance. She was conscious of her power, and altogether resolved to maintain it by prudence.

viii

All this time Toby had never seen Sally in daylight. He had seen her in a glimpse under the flickering hall gas, and again from time to time in the shine of street

lamps; but he had never once been with her in daylight. She herself was conscious of this, at first accidental, but now deliberate, mystification; and she dreaded the disclosure that was bound to come. It was not, she knew, that she was ugly; but only that to a man like Toby her small face and sandy hair might mark her down and ruin everything. She feared to notice a change in him, a change from their present and increasingly confidential relation to an indifference, a contempt, which she might find unbearable. The feeling was acute. It was not solely due to dependence upon Toby, but was a part of her long-suffered self-disparagement and a fear, almost fatalistic, that she could never keep a man's interest. The fear grew more intense as she fell into the bittersweets of a lover's doubtings. The day must come, and then what would happen? She longed to twine herself into his life before he could see her clearly. Perhaps then he would not notice? Perhaps even now he knew, and did not mind?

That was one mood. Another was a recognition of her own piquancy. In this stronger mood, she concentrated upon her own prettiness, the slimness of her body, her power to please him. But the confidence did not last, because he had become a necessity to her. Having half-determined to snare him, Sally was herself snared by the gins of love. She was hard, but she was soft. She was cold, but she was warm. And as each day she used the sewing machine or roughly stitched the raw material for Miss Jubb's costumes, Sally always looked to the nights. When it rained, and she had to stay indoors, she chafed irritably and went early to bed. When she met Toby she was full of unwonted high spirits. For a long time she did not know what had happened to her. Then at last the truth flashed out one morning

as she lay in bed, and with a little laughing sound Sally knew that she was in love.

She was in love. And Toby, how did he feel? A new stage had been reached, when her caution was directed to an altogether different end. She did not now seek so coolly to play with his inclinations. She had great need for care lest she should betray her own secret. The occasional contacts with him had become an eager need, and must be checked so as to make them appear as accidental as they were deliberate. Sally was not withholding from coquetry, but from dread lest she should give herself away and show herself over-willing. She noticed everything he did, without watchful scrutiny, and with the merest quickness of her caressing glance. She loved everything in him, his speech and his movements, his strength, his stubbornness, his rough carriage and silence. She loved him. She feared him. She did not dare to risk losing him. Above all, she longed to be in Toby's arms, to be desired by him.

Once, when she was examining her face in the mirror, and trying to imagine just how pretty Toby might be made to think her, Sally lost her nerve. She was tearful all that day, tearful and speechless, so that a rebuke from Miss Jubb brought about a real fit of crying. Miss Jubb, astounded at such a collapse, instantly abandoned blame and showed true kindness of heart, while May Pearcey looked on with round saucer eyes above her round apple cheeks. And Sally went home early, ashamed of herself, once more irritable to viciousness, and spent the time before her mother's return lying upon the bed and trying to sleep. There was no walk that night. Toby went out as usual, and even ventured a whistle when she did not come; but Sally remained indoors. She did not, indeed, hear the whistle, as she was at the back of the house; but she knew he was waiting. She

dared not go. In half an hour she heard Toby return, and go tramping indignantly up to his room directly above. The sound made her cry more than ever, but very quietly, in case her mother should hear and awaken.

The next night was even more wretched, for Toby went out and was nowhere to be seen when Sally followed him. She walked fruitlessly in the directions they had taken upon previous evenings, and came back disconsolate and exhausted. Pale and ill, Sally could not sleep. She had been living poorly, and her spirit was low. The future was dismal. Toby must have thrown her over. It was in vain that her wits consoled her with the certainty that he must have missed her, that a boy who did not care about her would never have shown such surly pique as his. So great had her love become that she could not listen to such reassurance. Only the worst was convincing enough for her misery. He was gone. He was done with her. She had lost him. No wonder then when she was alone Sally's eyes filled with weak tears.

Fortunately enough the next day was a Saturday, and she was able to go alone up to Waterlow Park, on Highgate Hill. She walked up the Holloway Road alone, and saw the autumn sun flashing upon the cross which stands erect above St. Joseph's dome. The air was already murky with the heaviness of the season. Leaves lay upon the ground and in the pathways. The cable-cars grunted and groaned upon the hill, and the Park looked bleak in the daylight. But the exercise did Sally good, and she saw other people, and watched some children playing touch until the Park bell rang to show that the gates were going to be closed. Even then she lingered, watching the moving figures and noticing the greenness of the grass under the shrivelling leaves.

From that walk she returned more healthy and in

better spirits. She determined to go out marketing with her mother in the evening, and walked back past the flaring lamps, at which women were already crowding, with her head in the air and her courage high. She almost forgot Toby while she was bathed in this flustering brilliance of light and noise. Only far below, in her heart, continued that inexhaustible consciousness of her love. Even in this temporary oblivion she shivered as she came to the darker part of the road.

Sally was once again among shops; and then she went down a side road. And her heart was beating rather fast as she approached the house, in case Toby should meet her. It was with a mingled relief and chagrin that she reached the house alone. She was inside the door now, and the woman on the ground floor was just standing on a chair to light the gas. Sally had to wait for a minute until she plunged heavily down and dragged the chair aside.

"Oh," said the woman. "There's a letter for you. It's just come. This minute."

It was not often that Sally had a letter. Had Toby written to her? She pounced upon the envelope. Fancy his doing that! Oh, no. It was only from Aunt Emmy, at Brixton. Well, perhaps Aunt Emmy knew somebody in the West End. What could she have written about?

"Is mother in, d'you know?" Sally asked the woman.

"I *fancy* . . . yes, I *fancy* she just went out. Shoppin', I expect. It's a nice evening. You know, what I call crisp. Not that sort of muggy . . . ugh . . ." She gave a great shudder, as the man in the fairy tale did when his wife poured gudgeon upon him while he slept.

Sally, threatened with a lengthy conversation, made for the stairs. She reached their room, which was lighted; and so she knew that her mother would not be long.

A kettle was singing on a small fire of coal blocks, and the teapot was laid to warm. Sally looked round the room, guessed that her mother had gone out for tea or sugar, and tore open her letter. In ugly crude writing she read the kind words Aunt Emmy had sent.

"Dear Sally. How are you and your mother? She takes no notice when I write to her, so perhaps I'd better start writing to you. Such news I've got. I've won thirty-five pounds in a competition. I don't know how I did it any more than you do. Anyway, Sally, I don't want to forget my little niece, and so here's a little something for you. I'm giving the boys some, and buying a new dress, and then I'm going to bank the rest against a rainy day. Waste not, want not, you know. Don't tell mummy I've sent you anything, but spend it on yourself, love. Get a bit of something nice. Your affectionate Aunt Emmy."

Enclosed was a postal-order for a pound. Sally's heart seemed to stop beating for an instant. She looked again at the postal-order, and with a sharp movement put it inside her blouse. Then she put the letter in the fire, and watched it flame and blacken and flick to pieces in the draught. Slowly, thinking with all her might, she took off her out-of-doors jacket and hung it up. A pound! She was rich! With a pound you could do a lot. You could . . . you could buy material for a frock. You could buy underclothes, stockings, shoes. Not all of them, but what you wanted. Or you could buy a hat and sweets and scent and . . . oh, lots of things! A whole pound to spend! Slowly, slowly came Sally's mind round to something from which it instantly darted away. It crept back again. It seized upon her will. With a

pound you could . . . you could make your hair look nice, and your face . . .

After the resolve, Sally was quite cool. She turned to greet her mother with entire self-possession. But her ears were strained, because overhead she heard a heavy footstep.

ix

The thing determined, Sally was faced with a great difficulty. She did not know how to do things. She had to find out. You couldn't make a fool of yourself and ask at a shop. She had talked to May once or twice about . . . making your hair look nice . . . well, dyeing it, if you wanted to know; and May could only show her advertisements clipped from the Sunday paper. She had not kept those advertisements: she had not liked the look of them. Mother wouldn't know. She must do it at once. A bold plan had come into her mind. She was near the end of her second year with Miss Jubb. She could go into the West End if only she looked nice enough. If she could do it tonight or tomorrow she could meet May Pearcey first thing on Monday morning, get her to tell Miss Jubb Sally was ill, and perhaps go after some situation during the day. What a game! But how was she to get the stuff? That was the difficulty. No, it was the easiest thing of all. Mrs. Perce! Mrs. Perce used peroxide, because she had once been a barmaid. But that meant a long time. Sally must have something quick in its action. Mrs. Perce would know. Mrs. Perce knew everything of that kind. The notion of going shopping with her mother was abandoned. She had more important things to do. She would go and see Mrs. Perce immediately after tea. Then, while old Perce was playing the piano, she would get to know everything. Sally became wildly animated. She

glimpsed the future. Transformed, she would conquer. Toby would be won. She would be in the West End. A whole new vista opened before her, glittering with promise. Never had she been so excited, even when Toby first spoke to her.

Mrs. Minto wearily threw off her dingy cloak and raked the fire, so that the kettle began to boil. She looked in a lethargic way at Sally, as a cat looks at a stranger in whom it is not at all interested; and then mechanically took down the tea-caddy from the mantelpiece. As she stooped over the kettle there seemed to be cramp in all her limbs. The little bell-pull of hair was smaller than ever, and the hair itself was more grey. Her whole bearing expressed a lifeless dejection. Panting faintly as the result of her late posture, Mrs. Minto brought the teapot to the spotless table, and clumsily touched the teacups and spoons so that they jarred upon Sally's nerves. Everything her mother did now annoyed Sally. The slow motions, the awkward way in which her fingers turned to thumbs, the shortsightedness that made her unable to thread a needle or read a paper except through an old magnifying glass, the general air of debility and discouragement. Sally felt furious with her all the time—"Old fool . . . old fool!" she would frantically murmur to herself; and then would fall again into despair at her own sensation of frustrate youth. She had lost love for her mother, had no pity to give in its place; and only awoke in these moments of dreadful exasperation to the sense that she was still dependent upon Mrs. Minto for her existence. During this teatime, while her mother mutely ate bread and margarine, Sally was away in the clouds, dreaming of all that her windfall was to produce. It was to produce beauty, opportunity, happiness. So much for a pound to do! Sally was so impatient to call on Mrs.

Perce that she could hardly eat anything or drink her tea.

"You *are* worritting and fidgetting, Sally," cried Mrs. Minto, peevishly. "Sit still, there's a good girl. I don't know what's come to my 'ead. It feels all funny inside, and if I put my hand there it's like I got a bruise. And yet I don't remember knockin' myself anywheres, and I can't understand it at all, because it's not as if I'd taken anything to disagree with me; and yet there it is, a nasty pain all inside my 'ead and a feeling as though I'd got a bruise on the outside. I was telling Mrs. . . . oh, dear, what *is* her name? . . . Mrs. . . . Roberson about it, and she said that's what her 'usband used to suffer from, and . . . *he* took . . ."

Sally ignored the rest of the speech. Her mother rambled on; and Sally looked at the clock. She'd get to Hornsey Road about six. That would be time enough. There would be the Clancy kids playing in the doorway, so she would go straight upstairs to Mrs. Perce; and she would say . . .

Self-absorbed, both went mechanically on with the unappetising meal. Upstairs Toby walked once more into his own room; and then came running heavily down the stairs and past their door and then right down to the street. Sally's heart was in a flutter, and her eyes flew once again to the clock. It was so early for Toby to be going out. She would not see him, then. She would not see him, and all her excitement was gone like an exploded toy balloon. The heart was taken out of her enterprise. He was going out: he did not want her: he was finished with her. Sally could not repress the single sob that rose to her lips.

". . . so I asked Mr. Flack if they'd ever kep' it, and he said no, they never had, and told me to try at Boots's, down by the Nag's Head . . ."

"Oh, *mother,*" cried Sally, beside herself. "Do shut up about your head. It gives me the hump." Then, as she became aware of what she had said, she defensively proceeded. "Well, you keep on talking about it, and it doesn't do any *good* to talk about it. If you want to know, I'm ill myself. I've got a headache, and I've got the rats . . ."

"You got no call to speak to your mother that way," said Mrs. Minto. "If I'd a spoke to *my* mother like that, I should have got the strap. So mind that, Sally. It's not nice. I've noticed you getting very unmannerly and out of hand lately. Very rude. I don't know what to do with you, you're so rude. It's not right, and it worries me so that I can't think what I'm doing. I was talking about it the other day to Mrs. Roberson, and *she* says . . ."

"Yes, ma," said Sally, rising, and going to the door to take her hat down from the peg. "She seems to have got a lot to say. Doesn't seem to be much sense in what she says."

"Now, you're not to . . ." By this time Sally had one sleeve on and was feeling for the other. In a glance at her little peaked determined face, and obstinate mouth, Mrs. Minto's spirit suddenly failed. Where she had meant to be maternally peremptory she became querulous. "Wherever you going now?" she asked weakly. "Oh, you *are* a naughty wilful girl."

"Out," said Sally, bluntly. Unheeding the outcry that followed, she was out of the door and down the stairs before her mother could check her; and with a new ugly sense of revolt was on her way to see Mrs. Perce in a mood of reckless despair. Left alone, Mrs. Minto washed feebly up, and sighingly dried the cups and plates and rearranged them in the cupboard. Presently she sat in a limp curve over the fire, in a kind of

stupor, dreaming of she knew not what. Every now and then she would give a jerk in anger at Sally's rudeness and recently uncontrollable highhandedness, which recurred to her attention whenever her thoughts touched reality. For the rest she sat motionless, until the coal-blocks subsided and the fire went black.

X

Out in the dark streets, Sally was as if enveloped. First she looked this way and that for Toby; but he was gone. A wave of hysteria passed over her. She hated him. She hated him for such loutish cruelty. He didn't care. And because he did not care, although she tried to feel indifferent, she loved him the more. Blindly she walked away from the house, and heard the trams grinding, and the rattle of carts over the rough paving. Holloway Road at this point is at its worst—dull and ugly, with an air of third-rate respectable indigence. She crossed the road, and passed into a squalid thoroughfare called Grove Road, and marched past the ugly houses with her head in the air, pretending that she had no interest whatever in Toby. All her thoughts were busy inventing indifference; and her consciousness was at each turn confusing and contradicting her thoughts. If solitude had been possible to her, Sally would have cried; but as a rule she cried very little, both because she was rarely alone and because she was not naturally hysterical. Fighting, therefore, against what she felt to be weakness, she proceeded on her way, trying to laugh at rival butchers shouting insults and challenges across the street. At the post office near her old home she changed her open postal-order, and was given a half-sovereign and ten shillings-worth of silver. This money she care-

fully put, in paper, inside her blouse. She was then ready for her interview.

At the old address new tenants already occupied the first floor flat, and Mr. Clancy stood at the gate smoking his pipe. The man who lived in the ground floor flat next door still showed his glass-covered sign "Why Pay Rent?" Children littered the few inches of asphalt which served as front garden to the two houses. Seeing Sally, Mr. Clancy took his pipe out of his mouth, spat, and nodded at her in a friendly way.

"Hello, Sally. Keepin' well? Look fine."

"I've come to see Mrs. Perce—Mrs. Barrow, you know."

Mr. Clancy jerked his head, receptive of the news, and as Sally passed him continued to smoke and to regard the traffic. He must have been bitterly cold, she thought; but she knew he must be standing outside either because Mrs. Clancy was out or because she was in. The stairs were just as steep as of old, and as dark. Sally had absolutely no memory of her father's fall. She was merely curious about the new people in the flat. But she did not see them, for all the doors were closed, and she kicked her feet against the stairs, stumbling a little in the darkness.

At her further progress a door flew open above, and Mrs. Perce looked out.

"Sally! Well I never!" she ejaculated. "Perce! Here's Sally come to see you!" Perce's reply did not reach Sally, but there was an exchanged kiss with Mrs. Perce, and then her coat and hat were off and she was conscious of overpowering warmth and kippers and a general sizzle of comfort and plenty. "Had your tea?" demanded Mrs. Perce. "Have another. Come on. Plenty of kippers. Perce! Sally's eating your kippers!"

Perce appeared, rubbing the back of his neck with a

towel—a large fair red-faced man with a broad grin. He put his hand on Sally's shoulder, and shook her. Then he went out of the room again, and Sally began almost immediately upon the feast. It was such a jolly, cosy, close room, so bright and gaudy in its decoration, that it was Sally's idea of what a kitchen should be. The walls were a varnished brown, so that they shone in the lamplight. Polished candlesticks stood by a shiny clock on the mantelpiece. There were bright pictures and a brilliant lamp and a glittering tablecloth covered with polished dishes and silver. She had a great admiration for old Perce and Mrs. Perce. They both loved comfort and food and drink, and both had hearty laughs that showed all their teeth. Both had shrewd, glistening, money-engrossed eyes; both were large and stout and cheerful and noisy. To anybody as young as Sally noise goes a long way towards cheeriness, because it deadens thought. So when old Perce came and took his place at the table she suddenly threw off her despair with the volatility of childhood, and laughed aloud and ate and drank, and made sly remarks, until she became an altogether different Sally from the one who had taken an earlier tea with her mother. She was now in high spirits. All sorts of funny things came into her head—things she had seen and thought since their last meeting; and when she repeated them the Barrows laughed in great roars that filled her with conceited exultation. It was so long since she had laughed. It was so long since she had fed properly. This was like a dream, a riotous dream of noise and colour. She looked from old Perce's red face to Mrs. Perce's almost equally florid cheeks, her eyes travelling like dragon-flies, as bright and eager as possible.

And all the time she was taking in Mrs. Perce's appearance. Mrs. Perce wore a black silk dress, very plain,

but well-cut. She had a gold brooch at her throat, and a thin gold chain round her neck. Her hair was abundant, and was dressed in a great blob upon the top of her head. It was a noticeable colour, fair and startling. She did not decorate her eyebrows and eyelashes, which were darker than her hair. And she wore high corsets, because her bosom, although firm, was inclined to be overflowing. The bodice of her dress fitted closely and emphasised what was still a very shapely figure. She was what would be called a fine woman. Her eyes were full and clear; her lips were well-moulded; her teeth, rather protruding, were unimpaired. Sally was filled with renewed envy of her personal advantages. Then her eyes went back to Mrs. Perce's hair. It was too obviously doctored. She didn't want anything like that. She wanted something more delicate . . .

The truth flashed upon her. Mrs. Perce was a trifle on the coarse side. Sally quickly compared Mrs. Perce's plump hands with her own lean ones. At the scrutiny, she put her hands below the table, for they were not clean. But if they had been clean she would have taken pride in them; for where the fingers of Mrs. Perce were stubby her own were slim and pretty. She understood her own shortcomings, but in the quick observations and comparisons she had been making, Sally had learnt a great deal more clearly than ever before how careful she must be to avoid exaggeration in all she did. Dressed and adorned as Mrs. Perce was dressed and adorned, she would have looked a guy. It was a new lesson to her, and a valuable one.

"Have you noticed," said Mrs. Perce, "how me and Perce's dressed up today?"

Sally was staggered. She looked quickly at old Perce and saw that he was in his best clothes, with a lovely

new spotted blue and white tie, and a dahlia in his buttonhole.

"Of course," she said. "I noticed everything. Didn't like to ask. What is it? Is it your birthday? Wish I'd known," she added, half-truthfully. "I'd a brought you a present."

"No," laughed Mrs. Perce. "Very good guess. Not a birthday. It's the anniversary of our wedding-day. Been married nine years, we have."

"Nine years!" echoed Sally, awestruck. "Nine years! And you haven't had a baby yet!"

There was a startling guffaw. Old Perce slapped his leg and bayed. Mrs. Perce threw herself back in her chair, showing every brilliant tooth. The noise was tremendous.

"The things she says!" shrieked Mrs. Perce. "Perce, I always said that child was a caution!" They both laughed until they were in an extremity of mirth.

Sally recognised herself as a wit, flushed, and laughed as heartily as they. She had spoken incautiously, as a child, and without sophistication. But she accepted responsibility for her joke. She was not in the least flurried, but was pleased at being considered an adept in the ways of marriage. At heart she was despising herself for not having been more truly observant of their clothes, because in reality she had been so concentrated upon Mrs. Perce that she had never thought to spare an eye for Mrs. Perce's husband. She was thankful to have ridden off so easily upon her naïveté. Meanwhile, having laughed amply, the Barrows had resumed their tea.

"Nine years, eh!" said old Perce, reflectively. "Takes some believing, Poll. Nine years. Nine years, and no baby, eh!" He shook his head, like a cat sneezing, and laughed again. "Here, Sally. Have some more kipper. More tea, then. Poll, here's a lady will have some more

tea, if you please, ma'am. Sweet enough, Sally? As before, if you please, Poll."

"See, where was you then, Perce?" asked Mrs. Perce. "Nine years ago."

"This time nine years ago——" murmured old Perce, reflectively. "I was at Potter's. Yes, Sally, I waddn't makin' above two pound a week when I got married—if that. Two pound a week was about my top-notch in those days. Well, it's different now." He shrugged his shoulders. "And I'll tell you for why, Sally. It was Poll, there. Don't you forget it. If a man's got a good wife—say there's something in him—he'll end his days in comfort. *She'll* see to that. Now, the man you marry——"

"Here, Perce! Steady on!" cried Mrs. Perce. "Sally's not seventeen yet, remember."

"Wait!" Old Perce directed a finger. Sally was brimming with gladness, at the topic and the confidence in herself which she saw he was going to express. "The man you marry, Sally—he'll have to *be* a man. Understan' what I mean? None of these fine la-di-da fellows, but a Man. And—if he works, you save. Not to scrape, you understand. Just save. For the first five years, be careful. Have your fun. No harm in that. But be careful. No kids. No swank. Stability, that's what's wanted. Stability. If you've got a bit of money behind you—— See what I mean?"

"Oo yes, Mr. Barrow," said Sally, incoherent with pride. "That's just what I think."

Old Perce looked at Mrs. Perce, raising his shoulders as if to exhibit Sally to her. There was a nod between them. For some time all became rather thoughtful, perhaps thinking—as she was uncontrollably doing—of Sally's future. Old Perce took out his pipe at last.

"I'm just going to step in the other room, Sally," he remarked, "and have a pipe and a bit of a tune. I'll see

you later—you ladies," he added gallantly, with a bow. And then he withdrew, leaving them alone, with Sally's cheeks flushed at the warmth and the subject they had been considering. All the time old Perce had been talking she had been wishing that Toby had been there to hear. Then he'd have seen what these people thought of her. They didn't think of her face; they didn't go off in a huff because she had been too ill to go out one evening. They knew. . . . Tears filled her eyes. She stared at the red fire in the grate. Mrs. Perce had her back turned, filling the kettle for the inevitable washing-up, and so she did not see this sudden arrival of tragic reflection. All she saw was a willing Sally gathering the dishes and scraping the fishbones together ready for throwing behind the fire. How was Mrs. Perce to visualise that other tea, that lonely figure in the other room? How was anybody to understand why Sally was so different from what she had been at home?

Over the washing-up, the two became confidential. Sally broached the subject of the West End. She dilated upon it. Mrs. Perce was all sympathy, and full of agreement.

"You're quite right," she said. "And I'm glad. I wish I could help you. Now, can I?" She thought a moment. "Wait a bit. Wait a bit."

She went out of the room. Amid the din of "There you are, there you are, there you ain't—ain't—ain't," Sally heard her call: "Perce, what's the name Maggie Merrick calls herself now?" There was a silence. The door of the other room was closed. Sally, standing by the kitchen table, drying a plate, strained her ears unavailingly. A silence was upon the flat. Only the fire huskily caved in, and little darting sparks flew into the air. It was as though her life hung suspended. Then, in a few minutes, Mrs. Perce returned, a triumphant beam upon

her face. "You go and see Maggie on Monday," she said. "I'll write her a letter. She calls herself Gala—Madame Gala. Got a place round behind Regent Street, and about twenty hands. She's a very old friend of mine. . . . I'll give you a letter tonight. Just say you come from Polly Barrow. She'll see you. Course, I can't be sure. . . ."

"No, no!" Sally's concurrence was eager. Her heart was like a flame. "You *are* kind to me, Mrs. Perce."

"If I can help you, Sally . . . Mrs. Perce's voice took on a tone of kindness almost solemn. "Well, that's all right. Just wait till these things are washed."

Trembling, Sally introduced her other problem. At first Mrs. Perce gave a great laugh, and looked very sharply at Sally. She looked at her dress, at her face, at her hair.

"I don't want to look . . ."

"It wouldn't help you to look made-up. Not with Maggie. So there *is* a boy!"

"No!" Sally's tone was fierce.

"Oh, all right." Mrs. Perce was evidently not altogether convinced. She dried her hands, her head consideringly upon one side.

"Who'd look at me?" There was a vain effort in this speech to corroborate the disclaimer; but there was also an ingenuous and pathetic appeal for some sort of reassurance, for this was Sally's hidden fear.

"Don't be a fool, Sally. If a girl makes up her mind to have a man . . ."

Sally's heart leapt. She looked with shining eyes of glory at Mrs. Perce. It was the announcement of her dream, a confirmation of her hope. She was for a moment ecstatic.

"Oh, Mrs. Perce!"

"You just look at him like that, my dear. Well, I'll

tell you . . . You don't want to look *too* fresh. Don't use peroxide. Henna's the stuff for you."

"Henna! How much?" Sally was desperate. The word was open sesame to her.

"Wait a bit. I'll think. Henna. And a face cream. But mind, Sally, be careful. Not too much of it. And whatever you do, remember your neck. *You* don't see it; but others do. All that's above your dress. And a bit below. Some people are inquisitive. And just a bit of lip salve—just a tinge. See, your lips aren't red enough. But you've got to be on the watch not to overdo it. No good looking like a tart."

"No. It's just the hair and the freckles," breathed Sally.

"Oh, well . . . We'll make a picture of you. And the eyebrows, Sally. But only a bit, Sally. Only a bit. You've got to be moderate. . . ."

Mrs. Perce went off into a delighted silence. She was in her element. She had before her a great opportunity, and all her vanity was roused. They understood one another. And for all Sally's disclaimer Mrs. Perce was in no way deceived about her ultimate object. She was as aware of Toby as if she knew the facts. But she was too shrewd to force a confidence. To herself she was laughing with the full enjoyment which some women, if not most of them, bring to the contemplation of an intrigue and its ultimate consequences. Later, she resolved to add a word of warning upon the handling of that subject. But more thought encouraged her to be silent. There was that in Sally's bearing which gave Mrs. Perce to understand that in the long run Sally knew what she was about. Mrs. Perce was conscious of a smart feeling of admiration for this child.

xi

Clasping tightly the precious henna and her other purchases, Sally hurried home through the dark streets. Within her blouse was the letter to Madame Gala. Her head was full of her plans, her delighted anticipations of victory. For this moment she could not contemplate the possibility that all would not go well. She was intoxicated. Her heart was swelling. Thoughts galloped away, like steam from a boiling kettle. She kept no memory of them. It was enough for her that she was thrilled with her own prospects. Of course Mrs. Perce's friend would take her on. Of course Toby would fall in love with her. She could make him. Once let her achieve her immediate objects, and there was no end to future possibilities. How strange, how wonderful, the difference which the last few hours had made to her! It really seemed true for once that in the darkest hour dawn was most nearly at hand. She let herself into the house and crept up the stairs, subdued but exultant. It would now have taken much more than the coldness and darkness of the horrible room to spoil her excited happiness. She even welcomed them, because if her mother awoke there would be the less need for explanations. She stood a candle upon the washstand, screened from the bed, and lighted the oil stove which they always used for preparing the breakfast. Her purchases were carefully arrayed, and then hidden. She removed her outer clothes, and let down her hair, shivering slightly, but tense with resolve and the absorption of the moment. Round her shoulders she hung a big towel, and kicked it out, looking down at her legs and feet. She was conscious of pride, of physical freedom. She made small dancing steps, as happy as a child, while she waited and waited for the slow kettle to boil.

Later, Sally stole to bed, careful not to touch her sleep-

ing mother, lest her own chill body should awaken her and provoke a querulous scene. She was shuddering from head to foot. It seemed to take hours to shake off the frozen feeling, and if she raised her feet and touched them with her hands they were like pieces of ice. They were still cold when she forgot everything; and she awoke, the towel still about her head, with the sun up and the day well advanced. A careful hand to her hair, a quick scurry to the mirror, a leap of apprehensiveness; and then she was back in bed, shamming sleep, because her mother had stirred. The two lay side by side for ever so long, until Sally could once again allow herself to breathe freely. She did not examine her feelings: she only knew that she was afraid and confident, alternately timid and ashamed, and then again breathing deep with satisfaction. She had begun. She was set out upon her adventure. At a blow she had to put everything to the test. How she longed for the next day! How she longed for her interview with Mrs. Perce's friend, and for her next encounter with Toby!

xii

At night she allowed her mother to go to bed first, and waited a little while before beginning her preparations. She was so long that her mother, although still engrossed by the pain in her head, began to grumble.

"What you doing, Sally?" she cried sharply.

"Washing my hair," answered Sally, like a shot.

"Ought to have done it in daylight, silly girl. And dried it in front the fire. I don't know what's *come* to you, Sally. You seem to do everything you can to worrit me. Now I want to go to sleep, and you keep the lamp burning, and the fire burning, and it's all alight, so I can't get off."

Sally shaded the lamp. Her lip was curled. She did not deign to answer the complaint. Silly old fool; always grumbling! Let her wait. Let her wait and see what happened! Sally was less excited, and less clumsy, tonight. She was warmer, too; and that gave her more assurance. Once her mother had fallen asleep, as she knew from the loud breathing, she became leisurely. Her actions were even luxurious, so much more at ease was she. First of all she combed her hair, wishing it were longer. Then she made all her dispositions. For the next hour she was busy, and by the time she was in bed she had begun to giggle almost hysterically. She lay quite still, and quite warm, listening for some sound of Toby. But none came. Wherever he was, she did not hear him before she went to sleep.

And then in the dark morning her mother could not see the transformation that had occurred; and Sally could not see it, either. They made a slow and tasteless breakfast, and Mrs. Minto slipped out to her first situation, where she had to be at half-past seven. From that she would go on to another at half-past ten that would keep her for the greater part of the afternoon. Sally, instead of going back to bed, as she often did when the two breakfasted together, dressed herself with great care and prepared to go out and meet May Pearcey. She tried to see herself in the mirror, but could only get a lamp-light view that frightened her. She had washed very carefully, and as she had made her own dress it fitted well and suited her. She had a big black hat and was going to get new gloves before calling upon Madame Gala. Her shoes were bad, but she brushed them well. Stockings she had bought on Saturday night. Turning round and round before the mirror, extending her arms, and patting down her skirt, she was content with everything but the incalculable effect of her recent activities. But the part of her hair

which showed beneath her hat was a rich shade, and if her face looked artificially pale it still appeared smooth and fresh.

What doubt she may have had was set at rest by May Pearcey when they met. The encounter took place in Grove Road at the corner of Hornsey Road, just where the shops are; and the two girls walked westward together.

"Oo, Sally, you *do* look smart!" May irrepressibly cried. "Oo, what you bin doing to your hair! Looks lervly! Oo, and your face. Got off with a earl?"

She was all attention at Sally's tale, and Sally showed her the letter to Madame Gala. They stood together reading it. For the moment May was honestly full of congratulation. She was so simple-minded, and so little attached to the dressmaking, that she had no envy. A boy would have been a different matter. And she was honestly delighted with Sally's appearance.

"You look lervly!" she kept saying. "Oo, I do hope you get it. I say, come out 's evening, and tell me. Will you?" May was very coaxing indeed. She was sincerely impressed.

It was a compliment, as well as a curiosity. Sally hesitated. She had planned to see Toby; but if Toby was going to be a lout she might just as well show him she didn't care.

"All right," she said. "Look here, if I'm not there by half-past seven, you'll know I've been kept—mother's kept me. See?"

"Mother!" laughed May. "Well, I'll be there quarter-past. See! Shouldn't come any further, case old Mother Jubb's lookin' out the window. She might not believe you was ill if she saw you lookin' so smart. Might think you was takin' a day off to go to the Zoo."

They parted, May Pearcey to spin a tale of Sally's ill-

ness to Miss Jubb, and Sally to proceed, after getting a pair of black cotton gloves, to the West End. In the shop, half hidden among the rolls of flannel and little racks and trays of smaller articles of haberdashery, there was a full-length strip of mirror. It stood gloomily in the half-light of the shop, which, like all suburban drapers' shops, had the air of a crowded and airless cavern full of stale adornments. Sally did not see the mirror at first, but while the shop girl went to fetch the gloves, she was looking idly round when she caught sight of a slim young lady in black. The young lady was very trim, dressed all in black, with slim ankles and pretty hands, and a big black hat—and it was herself! Herself, looking like a lady. Quickly, she stepped to the mirror, examining her cheeks, her neck, her brows, and her gloriously richly-tinted hair. She was amazed and delighted. A proud smile twisted her thin little lips, so slightly touched with Lipsol that they did not seem to have been touched at all, but only to be prettier than usual. After the first curiosity, the first flush of recognition, followed precise scrutiny. Sally nodded to herself. She would do. There was no doubt of it. From that moment she was no longer triumphant or excited: she was sure. She had learnt a great lesson, that excitement is no criterion of victory or happiness, and that the artist is cool, confident, free from triumph. At a bound, Sally had become an artist. She had always been potentially an artist; but she at last had attained vision.

xiii

Precious pennies went to pay her tram fare to Tottenham Court Road; and from there she walked to Madame Gala's, asking the way, and getting rather flustered and bewildered at the pushing crowds and the big shops with their irresistible windows, and the extraordinary amount

of traffic that seemed to make Oxford Street one continuous torrent of carts and omnibuses. The big furniture shops in Tottenham Court Road had impressed her; but the shops in Oxford Street were beyond anything she ever remembered to have seen. A flash of comparison with Holloway—even with Jones's magnificent row of shops on the way to Highbury, or the big drapers and clothiers in the Upper Street—made her realise how right had been her longing for the West End. It had been more than a dream. It had been an inspiration. Holloway was seen in its dinginess, its greasy mud on the rough roads, the general air it had of being a step or two behind the times; and here was the brilliance, the enthralling reality, of the West to take its place. Sally was conscious of new buoyancy. If she had been pleased with Tottenham Court Road, and delighted with the essentially commonplace Oxford Street, she exulted in that alluring curve which will always make Regent Street a fascination for the visitor to London and even a satisfaction to the Londoner himself. Sally was both a Londoner and a visitor, and her feelings were proportionate. She did not know that she was proud of being London born and bred; but her eye was possessive, and she would not have given London in exchange for the dozen other great capitals of the world put together. She looked round at the shops, at the buildings and the traffic; and she made a historic remark.

"Cooh," she said. "Fine! Fancy *living* here! This is the place for me."

It was final. It took no account of the risks of a peradventure. Madame Gala was a mere cog in the great wheel of Sally's progress through life. Even Toby had at first no place in her survey. Then she wondered if he knew Regent Street. He could come one Saturday and wait for her outside Madame Gala's. They would swank,

and go and have tea at an A. B. C. or Lyons's; and perhaps go into Hyde Park. Gradually it came back to her that her father used to take them to Hyde Park on Sundays. But that was long ago, and on Sundays the traffic was less and the shops were all shuttered. She gave a sigh at the memory, awoke, and marched up to a colossal policeman who was wagging a pair of gloves in his right hand—as if to keep the flies away, but in reality to encourage the traffic. He inclined an ear, and an eye to her letter, and trumpeted out directions.

And at last Sally reached Madame Gala's, and with Madame Gala's another turning-point in her life. It was the first time she had been conscious of so all-important an event. When she came to the building she was trembling. Her eyes closed, almost in an expression of prayer. She took five minutes to climb the stairs to the second floor, and then turned to fly. She recovered, and hung about for a while, hoping for some accident to carry her right into the place. Then, with a feeble air of confidence, she pushed open the door and walked in without knocking.

Sally could have fallen down in horror; for as she entered she saw a very tall young woman talking to the most beautifully dressed person she had ever seen. And they were in a room such as Sally had never been in before—a room entirely decorated in a sort of grey-blue. Wallpaper, hangings, and chair-upholsterings were exactly uniform. The effect, although beautiful and restful, was to Sally's eye so sumptuous that she felt she must by some terrible mischance have come into a drawing-room. But she heard the young woman say, "Yes, meddam . . . I'll tell Madame Gala . . . Yes, meddam . . . Yes, meddam . . . quite . . . yes, I quite . . . *Good* morning, meddam." And then as the wonderful creature disappeared in a whirl of richness, like a fairy

godmother, the tall young woman turned almost pouncingly upon Sally, and in a contemptuous voice said "Yes?"

Sally shook herself. It was the gesture of one who has been dreaming.

"I want to see Madame Gala," she said, very distinctly. "I've got a letter for her from Mrs. Barrow."

"Where is it?" demanded the young woman. "That it?"

She took from Sally's unwilling but unresisting hand the letter which Mrs. Perce had written, pulled it from the open envelope, read it, and looked again at Sally.

"I want to *see* Madame Gala," said Sally, stubbornly. Her little mouth was now very savagely set, and if there had been any refusal upon the young woman's part there would have been a scene.

"All right. Keep your hair on," said the inquisitive young woman. "Are you Miss Minto?"

"Yes, I am." Sally nodded energetically, flushing. She wondered if the word "hair". . .

Her interlocutor turned, and went into an inner room, replacing the letter as she did so, and folding over the flap, so that it would seem as though she knew nothing of the contents. Sally quickly saw the kind of person she was —an interfering creature, with "Miss Pry" written all over her. She was tall and thin, and had gooseberry eyes and a small nose and a large sycophantic mouth. Sally had a picture of her all the time she was away—grey-blue dress and all. She didn't like her. She hated her. She knew that they would never get on together. Miss Nosey! "Yes, meddam; no, meddam . . . yes, I *quite* . . ." Sally tried to pronounce quite "quaite," as she had done. After all, she was only a sort of maid—somebody to take the names of callers. She'd got no right to be saucy. Old six-foot. Old match-legs. She'd got a nose in every-

body's business. Mind she didn't get it pulled! . . . But what a lovely room! Must have cost pounds and pounds! All grey-blue—even to the little ornaments on the mantelpiece, all except the black tiger. Fancy working in a place like this! Different to Miss Jubb's! Sally gave a sort of internal giggle, a noiseless affair that was almost just a wriggle of delight. Miss Jubb! Did you ever see anything like the dress she made for Mrs. Miller, of 17 Tavistock! Chronic, it was! Like a concertina! And poor old Annie Jubb getting flurried when the material frayed in the scissors! Cooh! Call her a dressmaker! More like a figure of fun!

"Come in, please," said Nosey, jerking her nose. And Sally started once again from reverie, to follow the tall young woman from the grey-blue room into another one which was all in a warm colour between orange and biscuit. She swallowed quickly, and heard a little runnel of moisture in her dry throat. There was a throbbing behind her eyes. She became very small and clumsy, and kept her head lowered, and her hands clasped.

When a voice bade her sit down, Sally stole a quick glance at Madame Gala. At once she lowered her eyes again, because they had met unexpectedly a pair of eyes more disconcerting than any she had known since her schooldays. Madame Gala did not employ a score of hands for nothing! She had looked at Sally the moment Sally came into the room, and did not cease to look at her. And she had very cold grey eyes, and was very cold (really very deficient in stamina) herself. She was terribly thin, and chilling, and capable. She was dressed in grey; but you could not see the dress except at the bottom of the skirt and the middle of the sleeves, because she wore a large pinafore-overall, of a lighter grey and a softer material. She had no pins in her mouth, and there were no pictures of costumes or sheets of paper patterns

to be seen. But the room, all the same, was a work-room, and there was a beautiful large table in it which could have served for cutting out a costume for a giantess.

"You're Miss Minto. How old are you? Hn, small for your age. Mother and father? When did your—oh, you're in mourning for him. How did he die? What sort of accident? Hn . . . What experience have you had? Miss *What?* Oh, yes . . . two years. Have you left? I see. Well, Mrs. Barrow's an old friend of mine, and I'd like to oblige her. Also, I want more help. My business is increasing. If you can start in a fortnight I'll pay you six—no, I'll pay you seven shillings a week. You get here at nine in the morning. You'll do as you're told, and behave yourself. You'll work under a very clever lady, Miss Summers, in that room. I'll show you. Come in here . . ."

Sally, shaking with jubilation, followed her into a very large room adjoining, where a number of girls were (apparently) frantically busy—far too busy to be conscious that their employer had entered the room. Sally did not believe that they were always so intent upon their work. She knew too much. To herself she said "Swank!" It was a beautifully light place, all decorated in a pale grey; and there was a long deep bench all round the room. It was lighted by windows and a skylight, and it was plain that a considerable amount of work was in progress. Sally gave a dazed glance round, and looked again, saying, "Yes, ma'am; Yes, ma'am," to everything Madame Gala said; and a few minutes later was out in the street again, engaged at seven shillings a week, and not knowing whether she was alive or dead, awake or dreaming. The day was still before her; she had nearly ten shillings hidden in her bodice; and she was a queen amid all the surging traffic of the West End—her West End—the place of her dreams, her pilgrimage, her triumph. Sally's eyes

were filmed with tears. She walked away from the building passionately fighting with sobs that rose from deep within her. The tears trickled down her white cheeks. And all at once she was laughing again, chuckling and chuckling as if this was the most splendid joke in the world. And then, when the laughter was done, she was once again Sally, deliberate, cool and unflinching. This was what she had determined. There were other steps to follow. She must not be too sure; she must go carefully. But all the same she would win. She was Sally. She was going to get on. She was going to be cautious. She was going to be secure. That was her touchstone—security. Without it, she would never know peace. At all costs, security. That meant keeping cool. That meant watching your step. And in the end it meant making money, and having enough to eat, and nice clothes, and pleasures, and all that she had never yet had. Into the eyes that had been brimming with tears, and, immediately after, with glee, there came once again a hardness, a determination. It was the expression of a wary animal, treading among dangers.

xiv

By an instinct, Sally turned west, so that she presently found herself in a confusing number of small streets; but when she had extricated herself and had mastered the geography of that part of London she was rewarded by coming out into Park Lane, with the fine breadth of Hyde Park open to her eyes and her impulse towards exploration. She pretended that she knew the Park; but in fact to her older eyes and in its weekday freedom from crowds it looked so different that she could not link it with ancient memories. Thus, for a time, its paths and its greenness and its air of great space gave her unquali-

fied pleasure. She wandered on, observing the fallen leaves, and the few pedestrians; and looked up at the blue sky, and marvelled to herself; and then presently she sat down upon one of the public seats and tried to get some coherence into her thoughts. She sat there for some time, her shabby little toes cocked up on the gravel before her, and she began to feel lonely and tired and restless, as though something further had still to be done. There was the whole day before her. She could not stay here, because although the day was clear and fine there was a chill wind, and she was not warmly clad. Already her hands were feeling numb in the cotton gloves, and her feet were losing the pleasant tired tingle they had had a short time before. The sense of innumerable hours which had to be filled was strong upon Sally, who had never previously had so much time to herself, alone. So she rose briskly from her seat, walked along the broad pathway, and came back to the Marble Arch, where Oxford Street began again. This time she was bent upon looking at the shops, and browsed for a time at the windows of Lewis's, at the end of Orchard Street. And then she had her inspiration. A clock told her it was after half-past eleven. May's words came into her mind: "She might think you was takin' a day off to go to the Zoo."

"Here, where's the Zoo," she suddenly, without a tremor, asked a policeman.

"They got plenty white mice," the policeman said. "No good you a-goin' there."

"Saucy!" rebuked Sally. "Suppose they let you out . . . on a chain."

"Quite right," said the policeman. "Didn't want to let me go. Everybody loved little Sammy. But the Police Force wanted me."

"Fancy wanting *you!*" remarked Sally, witheringly, staring at his good-tempered face, and, under his helmet,

at a pair of bright blue eyes. He was a "red" man. "Give 'em a bit of ginger, I suppose."

"As you go by the Marrabon Road, you just cross over and go into Madame Tussaud's. You'll see a lot of old friends and relations there. Charlie Peace, and Mother Dyer . . ."

"Who's she?" Sally demanded. "Mother Dyer. Never heard of her."

"Mother Dyer? Baby-farmer. Her you used to call 'Nursie.' Go straight along here, and when you've looked at Madame Tussaud's, keep down the Marrabon Road till you come to the Park. See? Regent's Park, that is. And walk along the nice broad road, and you'll find the Zoo on your left. Good morning, my dear . . . Don't let 'em keep you, will you? . . . Cahm alahng, 'ere; cahm alahng, 'ere." He broke off to attend to the traffic, which he addressed in a very different way from that in which he had spoken to Sally; and she, rather cheered by the exchange of badinage, set off towards Baker Street and the Marylebone Road with a new interest in hand. Madame Tussaud's and the Zoo in one day! What a day it would have been by the time she reached the end of it. What a tale she would be able to tell May in the evening!

Apart from the two visits which she made, to the wax-works and the menagerie, both of which took so long that she did not get home until six o'clock, Sally had no other adventure. She had lunch in the Zoo, and arrived back in Holloway with less than five shillings remaining from her windfall. But it had been a day, and it still held marvellous possibilities of an encounter with Toby. Her first thought on reaching home was of him. That was why she was so deaf to her mother's complaining. She did not hear it. And she did not tell her mother of the day's outing. There would be time for that later. If she told her now there would only be trouble, and Sally

was tired of trouble. When she had explained to Miss Jubb, and had left Miss Jubb on Saturday week, she would airily say to her mother: "I got a job in the West End, now." See ma jump! Sally was conscious for the first time of a slightly sinking heart. Suppose she didn't suit Madame Gala? Suppose she lost her new job after a week or two? Oh, rubbish . . . Rot! Time enough for the gripes when she got the sack!

She could hear no sound at all from the room above. Was Toby not home yet? He used to get home about ten minutes past six, as a rule. It was now a quarter-past If she did not hear him she would go and meet May, and then call in to tell Mrs. Perce all about the news, and then come home after her mother had gone to bed. She had her tea, turning up her nose at it, and all the time wishing for something better. For some time after the meal she stood about reflecting upon her day and upon the possibilities of the future. Consideringly, she at last said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"One day we'll have jam for tea, ma. And kippers. And fried sausages. And steak and chips."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Minto. "Whatever's put such ideas into your head!"

"And we'll have real coal, and thick blankets, and a new mattress, and new curtains, and a brass fender. And everything in the room'll be a beautiful gray-blue. And you'll sit here, doing nothing."

"I'm sure I shan't," exclaimed Mrs. Minto, fingering her mouth to hide a nervous smile of pleasure.

"Doing nothing. And Elbert, the footman, will come in with the tea and take it away again; and you'll say, 'Elbert'—mustn't say 'Elbert dear'—you'll say, 'Elbert, just bring me my glass of hot water at ten o'clock.' And he'll say, 'Yes, me lady.' No, he won't. He'll say, 'Yes, med-

dam . . . quite. . . . Yes, meddam.' That's what he'll say. Lick your shoes, he will, because you're rich."

"Rich!" sighed Mrs. Minto. "Who's to make me rich?"

"I'm going to make us all rich," explained Sally. "You mark my words and wait and see."

"I wouldn't mind not being rich," Mrs. Minto said, "if it wasn't that my poor 'ed . . ."

"O-oh!" cried Sally, in wrath. Her mood was crushed by this inexorable return to the subject she had been chattering to avert. "Give your old head a rest, ma. Here, come out for a walk with me."

"You're not to go out, Sally. Mrs. Roberson says. . . ."

"*That* for Mrs. Roberson," said Sally, already on her feet. "You don't suppose I'm going to stick in here and get frozen stiff. There's nothing to do indoors. I got no sewing. Only makes me fret if I stay at home. I'm going to see Mrs. Perce. . . ."

She moved hastily to the door, and closed it quietly after her, for she had heard below her the shutting of the front door, and she thought it might be Toby at last. It was nearly a quarter to seven. Her guess had been right. It was he. Seeming not to have heard him, she ran lightly down the stairs as he heavily mounted them. Her heart was thumping so that she felt quite sick and faint. She could no longer run, but could only totter down towards the inevitable confrontation. It was there, and it was past—a plain, boorish "Evening." She managed the rest of the flight at a run; but when she was out of doors Sally turned to the darkness and could no longer restrain her tears of anguish. This was the end of her day. Laugh in the morning, cry before night. That was the truest proverb that ever was made. She was heartbroken.

XV

There was no question of seeing May or calling upon Mrs. Perce. Sally was beaten. She was full of expostulations and arguments, but all were addressed to Toby, and she could not have borne any other society. So she wandered about the streets for an hour, miserably aware that once or twice she was followed by an aimless strolling youth who did not know how to occupy a lonely evening and who yet was too much of a coward to address her. In her mind she went over every detail of her friendship with Toby. It had become suddenly unreal, like a thing that had happened years before. And yet the throb of pain belonging to her sense of his cruelty was immediate. Every detail was clear to her; and the whole was blurred. He was a stranger; and yet his presence would at once have given life to her memories. They had been written, as it were, in invisible ink, which needed only the warmth of a fire to produce their message vividly once again. Sally sobbed from time to time; but she was no longer crying. Her pain was too deep to be relieved by tears, which with her were the result of weakness, since she was not naturally liquid. And as the memory was exhausted in its evocation she began to think as of old. Her quick brain was recovering its sway. She was no longer an overwrought child. And yet when she strove to plan a discomfiture for Toby, who had so wickedly hurt her, she shrank from that also; so it was still a restless and undetermined Sally who returned home to find her mother dozing by the feeble warmth of a dying fire.

The next day passed in a variety of moods, and in the evening Sally found in herself the determination to call upon Mrs. Perce. She had explained her non-arrival of the previous night to May, and had removed her grievance with a recital of all she had done during the stolen day.

She had endured Miss Jubb's sour scrutiny of her hair, which was accomplished without comment. And she had almost, but not quite, told Miss Jubb of her proposed change. At times her courage was very nearly high enough, but it never reached the necessary point, or the opportunity was ruined at the vital moment by some interruption. So Miss Jubb worked innocently, not guessing the blow that was to fall. That it would be a serious blow only Sally suspected. Miss Jubb had never even supposed it possible that Sally would leave her. The three of them spent the day in the little work-room, which managed by the end of the afternoon to be the coldest and the closest room in the neighbourhood, perhaps owing to Miss Jubb's use of a defective stove for heating, and her own radical immunity from chilblains.

After tea Sally went straight to Hornsey Road. In thinking of Toby as she left the house she made a light gesture with her fingers to show that he no longer existed. If she had met him she would have attempted no greeting, for such was her present temper. At the Barrows' she was received with acclamation. Old Perce, who had enjoyed a good deal of four-ale during the day, and had a jugful of it now at his elbow, collapsed at sight of her. He bayed a little, but with an expression of admiring wonder that gave Sally her best tribute. Mrs. Perce, the expert, nodded. She had received a letter in the morning from Madame Gala. So to her all the news was known. All the same, Sally spent a happy couple of hours in the flat, and collected her outdoor clothes with unwillingness. Each time she had been to see Mrs. Perce she had felt more strongly than of old the contrast between her always-cheerless home and their warm, prosperity-laden atmosphere. The recognition acted powerfully upon her. It was the creation in her mind of a standard of physical comfort, as the visit to Madame Gala had created a stand-

ard of decorative colour. She was frowning at the new perception as she left the house, and was half-absorbed in her consciousness of it.

The feeling did not prevent her, at first with a sharp tingling of surprise, and then, as she grasped the significance of the fact, a start of emotional disorder, from seeing a familiar figure in the light of the Supply Stores. Her heart jumped, and began to flurry in her breast. The figure she saw was that of Toby. He stood a little to the side of the Stores, watching the doorway from which Sally came. As she flinched, he came across the road. Sally pretended not to notice him, and knew that he was following her. But Toby made no attempt to speak to her while they were in the light of the shops. She saw that he had his cap pulled very low down over his eyes, and that his hands were not in his pockets, but hanging loose. He was dressed in a rough dark tweed suit, and looked like a fighter, but not a professional boxer. His carriage was clumsy, but light. His dark face was marked by a sort of determination—not bravado, not impudence, but a solid resoluteness. His eyes she had never properly seen. His mouth was large, but the lips were thin; the nose was coarse, but not big. He was ugly, but he was very obviously strong. He was not tall, but was very sturdily built, and gave the air of considerable strength. As he followed her she could hardly keep from looking back; it was only with a great effort that she kept her eyes forward, and as she turned into Grove Road she increased her pace. Sally knew quite well what he would do. He would wait until she had passed the block of shops and had come to the comparative darkness of the houses beyond. Then he would walk abreast and speak to her. And while she tried to think what to do her heart was strangling her. She was so excited that her breath

was coming almost in sobs. She was excited, but she did not therefore feel at his mercy.

It happened as Sally had foreseen. As soon as she was past the shops she heard his urgent voice at her elbow—"Sally!" For a moment she ignored it. Then she turned, very coldly, and with a slight sneer looked at him. They were side by side now. He was keeping step with her as easily as he could have kept step with a child. "Sally," he repeated. Sally stopped dead.

"What are you following me for?" she asked, viciously. "Why can't you leave me alone? Following me like that! I never heard of such a thing."

"I been waiting outside for you all the time. I've had no grub. I followed you from the house. I saw you start out just as I was getting home."

"Well, what of it? I didn't ask you to follow me, did I?" demanded Sally. But in the darkness of the street her eyes softened. Her heart swelled at the thought that he had waited for her in the Hornsey Road for fully two hours. Toby took her defiance as a matter of course. He was still standing doggedly before her, and as she began once again to walk rapidly in the direction of home he followed her, half a step behind. At the darkest part of the road he put out a hand to check her progress. Sally snatched away her arm, but he had been prepared for that, and caught her immediately. He held her, panting, as she pressed against a big stone gate-post.

"Let me be!" cried Sally, hoarsely and breathlessly. "Let me be." She did not scream. She was too impressed by his exhibition of strength. He continued to hold her, and they stood breast to breast, Sally panting, and Toby with a kind of stolid determination.

"Will you come for a walk quietly?" he asked, jerking his head.

"No," said Sally, "I won't." There was no mercy, no humility. Only a hard defiance.

"Yes, you will." He pulled her towards him, so that Sally could not escape. She was now wholly within the circle of his arm, not struggling, but with her poor thin arms staving him off. Her body was tense. But she made no sound, and if there were any passers they knew that this was only a typical lovers' tiff, common to the neighbourhood, and largely a matter of physical strength and feminine vituperation. "Yes, you will. See? Come on, Sally."

"You let me go," she demanded.

"Say you'll come. I'll let you go the moment you say that."

Sally hesitated, then bowed her head in a slow acquiescence. He released her, and she ran; but he easily overtook her, and she was once again held, still with her back to a pillar. Both were now breathing hard. Sally's head was lowered. She was suffocating. She seemed to be in complete darkness. And she had no sense of what was happening. The mere technique of the row absorbed her. They were almost like two quarrelling cats, both sullen, both glowering and full of resentment rather than burning anger.

"Will you come?" asked Toby. "Just for a walk. Half an hour."

"What d'you want me to come for?"

"Want to talk to you."

"Yes, well, I don't want to talk to you. Understand?" Sally was suddenly trembling with a passionate rage. Her voice quivered as she spoke, and the words tumbled out in a savage incoherence.

"I'm going to talk to you. So you may as well make up your mind to come. You don't want to stand here all night, do you?" He was as savage as she, and more

grim. Sally made an attempt to escape, and was further pinned. He was breaking down the defence of her tired arms. One of his knees was against her leg. She was slipping, slipping, and her resolve to fight against him was fading as rapidly in her sense of the physical contact. She burst into tears. For an instant he loosed her, at that, but as she sobbingly began to run away he resumed his former hold, pressing her against him, a broken little girl, and no longer the triumphant Sally of the morning. Her hand was to her eyes, and she was biting her lip to restrain her sobs. Toby put his free hand up and touched hers, held it, drew it away from her wet face.

"Sally," he said. "I want you. Don't cry, Sally."

His arm tightened. His face was close. Although she turned away her head, and tried to wrench herself free, Sally knew his lips were relentlessly following her own. She was conscious of all the joy of surrender, incapable of moving from those strong arms, incapable of avoiding his kiss. Her eyes closed, her heart rose; she was limp in his embrace, not as yet returning his caresses, but accepting them with a feeling of miserable thankfulness. Her hat was tilted back, and she felt his cheek against hers, his body against her own. How long they stood she did not know; but at last she put her hands up, put them round his neck, and feverishly kissed him, welcoming this joy that was half pain.

"D'you love me?" she asked breathlessly.

They were alone in the dark street, in the invisible world; and she had never been so happy. So at last Toby had his way, and they walked about the streets for an hour, until it was long past the time when Sally should have been in bed. Only then did they part, and Sally was half-undressed when she heard Toby passing upon his way upstairs. Her cheeks were burning, her

eyes shining, her heart exultant. Sometimes, as she lay wakeful during the long night, she was so happy that she could hardly breathe. But a moment came when happiness seemed overwhelmed in a poignance of emotion that resembled rather a terrible apprehensiveness, and it was then that Sally felt the tears trickling from her eyes. It was only the reaction from excessive joy; but she was deeply affected. She longed again for Toby's arms to be round her, pressing her face into the pillow to comfort herself with the pretence that he was still there. Exhausted, she slept.

xvi

All the next day she could not work for preoccupation with her happiness. She was mad with it, and reckless in her madness. It even, when rebuke came from Miss Jubb, gave her courage to mention Madame Gala. And that was a further cause for delight, since Miss Jubb's mouth dropped open at the news and she could hardly speak to her two girls for the rest of the afternoon. Sally, chuckling to herself, and every now and then grimacing at May Pearcey, abandoned herself to anticipations of the evening. She would see her dear Toby, would show how much she loved him, would feel herself loved, would hear and say all the little secrets they had never spoken until now. She would know at last what it was to be in love, and with the man who loved her. How wonderful it was! What joy! What fun! Sally could not conceal her grin of happiness. Her white face was as if it had become plump, so immediately did happiness transfigure her. And she looked at silly old Miss Jubb, and soppy May, and thought how they had no lovers. May had her boys—she could keep them. Sally had Toby. Toby was not a boy: he was a man. He shaved; she had felt the roughness of his chin. May's

boys looked as if they had smooth faces, or if they shaved it made their skins powdery. Miss Jubb had never had a boy at all, she shouldn't think. You couldn't fancy Miss Jubb as a young girl. She must be quite old—as old as Sally's mother—perhaps forty. But ma had been unlucky to strike dad. He had never been any good. Not like Toby. Toby was getting almost a pound a week already, he said; and when he was older he would have lots of money, and never be out of a job, because he worked with his hands, with engines, and a man who understood engines would never want for work. He was twenty, and he kept himself. He just took his meals with his aunt, and lived in his own room the rest of the time. How she would like to see his room. She longed for them both to get older. But she wanted to get on herself, first. She thought: if Toby's out all day, and we just have a little home, I shall be able . . . She thought she might be a dressmaker herself, and employ twenty hands, and have a waiting-room that was all grey-blue. She had told Toby about Madame Gala, and how he could come to fetch her Saturdays, and they'd have the afternoons together. Sally was brimming with plans.

In the middle of them there came a knock at Miss Jubb's door. Miss Jubb went, thinking it might be a customer. But she came back again in a minute, with a face even longer than it had been since she heard Sally's news. She could hardly speak, but stood against the dingy door, which she held closed, and swallowed quickly before she could say a word.

"Sally dear, there's a man here from the hospital. Get on your hat and coat, there's a good girl. He says your mother's been taken there. She turned dizzy just now when she was crossing the road, and was knocked down by a van, and run over. She's asking for you,

Sally. You're to go. It's not serious, he says. So don't worry about it. You're just to go and see her."

Mother? Ma knocked down by a van! Sally was on her feet in an instant. As Miss Jubb went out again to glean further details from the man, Sally struggled into her hat and coat. She turned with a callousness which showed that she did not in the least realise what might have happened, and addressed the startled and gaping May.

"We may not be princesses," she said with a sort of wild gaiety; "but we do see life!"

xvii

After she had seen her mother in the hospital Sally was again aware of that sinking feeling of having time to fill—a feeling of emptiness of immediate plan,—which she had felt in Hyde Park on the Monday. At seven she was to see Toby outside the house. It was not yet five. What was she to do? Not go back to Miss Jubb's, that was certain! Her mother had been lying in a cot in a big ward, and her arm was bandaged, and she said both her legs felt as though they had red-hot nails in them; but she was conscious, and they had told her she would soon be about again. Sally was to see Mrs. Roberson and tell her the news, and to go to two other places to let them know that Mrs. Minto would not be able to come for a time. And she was to be a good girl, and not worry, but to take the three shillings and ninepence which was in Mrs. Minto's purse, and look after herself, and explain to the landlady what had happened . . . She had a host of things to do, and she paid her three calls within ten minutes. So far the question of money had not troubled her. She did not think that three shillings and ninepence was very little to live on for perhaps a

month. Her emotions at the moment were so blithe that all she perceived in herself was a sense of liberty. Ma would not be worrying her every minute she was indoors to do this or that, and not to do the other. Ma would not be talking all the time about her head. Ma would not be watching her, asking what she was doing, playing the policeman, grumble, grumble, grumble. It was a fine liberation for Sally. That was the way in which she saw it.

Her first shock was when she arrived home and found her own breakfast dishes still strewn about the table as she had left them, the fire unlighted and the old ashes still lying in the grate and upon the hearth, the bed unmade. She was sobered. She first of all found the oil, filled the lamp, and set a match to it. Then she swept the hearth and carefully made a small fire. The coal-blocks took a long time to catch, as they always did, and they quickly burned dull. Upon them she set a kettle, washed the dishes in cold water, and laid the table for tea. The kettle took a century to boil, and she knelt close to the fire, warming herself and waiting for the first spiral of steam. Everything now made her feel splendid. She invented a game that she was married to Toby, and that she was expecting him home; so that for this evening all her work was thoroughly done. Even the bed was made with care. And when she had finished tea she cleared away, and spread a little old red cloth upon the table, and once more snuggled close to the puny fire. As she did so all her thoughts were for Toby. Already she began to listen for him, although it was long before his time. Thought of her mother's accident did not disturb her at all. Thought of the future was abandoned. Only the sweet delight of being with Toby again was her incessant reverie.

At last she heard him, and started to her feet. Her im-

pulse was to run to the door and whisper to him at once; but on the way thither she checked herself. Some scruple of prudence, lest he should think her too eager for him, made Sally allow the steps to pass on up the stairs. But for all that she watched the clock, and listened almost passionately for any sound from above. The fire died. She put on her coat and hat, standing near the fireplace to catch the last waves of heat, with her foot upon the fender and her eyes fixed upon the purplish glow, so rapidly fading to mauve and to grey. She was tense with expectancy. She had no consciousness of anything but her strained hearing. Tick-tick-tick. The clock raced on, but the hands all the time appeared to remain still, by so much did her eager heart outstrip them.

Then there was a thud upstairs, as of a door closed; and quick steps sounded in Toby's room. He stayed there a few minutes, his feet moving a little, and Sally guessed that he was washing himself. Then, noisily, he came down the stairs and left the house. He was barely past the door when Sally blew out the lamp; but she stood mutely in the darkness for more than a minute afterwards. Only when her own patience was gone did she obey her impulse and follow him, creeping down the stairs in the subdued brown light of the house. Out of doors all was black. She peered for Toby. He was there just under the lamp at a few yards distance, and she saw him move farther away at her approach. That action, and the sense of him, gave Sally the most extraordinary tremor of excitement and happiness, and her cheeks grew warm. She greeted him with the lightest touch of the arm, and felt in return his hand to her elbow. They walked without speech to the end of the road, and by common impulse to a dark turning where at this time of the evening they knew there would be no passers; and

there Toby caught her in his arms. There was no moon, and no sound in the street. They were entirely alone, and separated from the rest of mankind by an impassable wall of obsession. They stood pressed close to one another, kissing from time to time, and did not speak. They had at first nothing to say, but there was no shyness between them. They were absorbed in this physical contact. But after some time Sally told him her news, and made him tell her what he had done during the day, and felt a great proprietary interest in him all the while. They spoke in low tones, lovers and amorous lovers even in the middle of humdrum confidences. Toby was shocked about Mrs. Minto—far more shocked than Sally had been or could have been; but she airily reassured him in her first delicious abandonment to a sense of common life. She said "Oo, she's all right. Quite comfortable. More than if she was at home. And it's nicer for me, being alone. See, she grumbles at me—always at it—what Mrs. Roberson says, and about her head, and what I ought to do, and that. 'Tisn't that there's really anything to grumble at; only, you know, it's her nature. I never grumble. That's one thing about me. Doesn't matter *what* happens, I never . . . you know . . . keep on at it, like mother does. What's the good? Crying won't do any good, or grumbling either. I shall be happier while she's away—do what I like. Be on my own."

"Won't you be lonely?" Toby asked.

"Not with you. Different if I hadn't got you. But if I get frightened I shall just yell for you; and I shall think of you all the time, upstairs, and wonder if you're thinking of me. Will you be?"

"Course I shall," Toby swore, hugging her until she gasped. "All the time."

"Will you? It's nice to have somebody to . . . you know, like you."

"Is it?" he asked gruffly.

"Don't *you* feel like that?" she asked artfully. Her reward, another choking hug, was immediately forthcoming. "You *are* strong," Sally went on, and with a sense of daring and ownership and pride felt his arm for muscle. "I'm strong. In a way. Not massive, or anything of that kind. I can stand a lot. Mustn't think I'm weak because I'm small; but . . . Well, you know what I mean."

"Strong, but got no strength," suggested Toby. Sally shook him, chuckling proudly at his wit and will to tease. It was like shaking a tree, so immovable was he by the exerted strength of her weak arms.

"Saucy!" she said. "Though I s'pose it's what I meant. Toby, you do like . . . you know . . . *this?*" she suddenly asked, not bent upon a caress, but in a sudden doubt. Her arms were warmly about his neck as she spoke. Toby left her no doubt. He was not talkative; he had no ready flow of compliment; but he could speak the language which a young girl in love best understands. He could crush her almost to ecstatic forgetfulness in his vigorous arms. Thus embraced, Sally was in Paradise, and her one desire was to remain there, in a sort of annulment of every other interest; but even in Paradise she found her thoughts irrepressible. So she chattered on, while Toby grunted or did not say anything, or occasionally grew marvellously glib and told something about his work, or an anecdote about himself which she sometimes thought he must have read somewhere. And ever and anon they were lost in silence, and their closeness to one another, and their long breathless kisses, which made Sally lean her forehead against Toby's breast and enjoy exquisitely the sense of being weaker than he and of surrendering all her will to his.

If it had not been so cold they might have stood in this

way for the whole evening; but the wind was searching, and presently they began to walk along, he with his arm about her so closely that they walked almost with one motion. Toby smoked his cigarettes, and when he wanted one he put his left hand in his pocket, and drew out a cigarette, and Sally felt for his matches, and struck one, and held it for him, and received smoke in her face, and blew the match out, and received a kiss, Toby all the time never ceasing to hold her within his right arm. She wished there were more cigarettes, so much did she enjoy the sense of intimacy. Sometimes she could not resist the temptation to put her arm round Toby's waist, and give him a little private hug of her own, to show how happy she was. She loved the darkness more and more, because it made her bolder. And the sky was so dark that the lamps were like small flickers, and if anybody passed it was impossible for a face to be seen. And Sally was alone in this dream world with Toby. She wished it might continue like this for ever, night and day, beautifully quiet and secret, with Toby all the time loving her as much as he did now. It was lovely. It was lovely. She was happy. She did not feel tired or cross or mean or worldly any longer; but only happy, and full of love.

At last they heard a clock striking eleven, and Sally gave a jump.

"Mercy! Eleven o'clock. Must go home. Good job mother's not there. Else she'd be asking questions." She laughed as she spoke. "She'd want to know something. I shouldn't half have a time. 'Eleven o'clock: where you been?' I shouldn't mind. I'd take no notice. I don't take any notice of her, because . . . you know . . . it encourages her if you take any notice. Oo, the way she keeps on. You wouldn't believe. Drive me to drink, it would, if I had it all the time. But she's not there. . . ."

Sally hugged Toby. "Isn't it lovely! Nobody to grumble. Nobody to mind what time I get in. . . . Well, you know what I mean. I must go in now." But when it came to the moment of parting she clung to him. "I don't want to go. I don't want to go," she cried. "It's been so nice, and I've been so happy." To her horror she felt that she had begun to cry. With an effort she pulled herself free. "Well, I suppose I *must*. And you'll think of me, won't you? Just downstairs. And I'll think of you, and wish you were there. . . . Oh, fancy me saying that! Toby . . ." She was passionately serious. "Say you love me!"

"Love you!" said Toby.

She turned and waved to him when she was a few steps away, flew back to his arms, and stayed there for a few minutes. Then, this time with more resolution, she ran towards home, letting herself in with a sense of brazen guilt at her lateness, and treading softly up the stairs. When she was in the room, she shuddered a little, at the cold, and in her excitement. Then she lighted the lamp and looked at herself in the mirror—at her bright, betraying eyes, at her mouth, which was also betraying, and at her hair and cheeks and brows and hands. She was laughing, but not aloud. Her laughter was the mirth of happy excitement. And, still so happy, she began to undress; and then thought she would make herself a cup of tea. So she finished undressing while the kettle boiled, and was sitting up in bed drinking her tea when she heard Toby go upstairs. His movements made her start, and the tea dribbed over the side of the cup. Into her head suddenly came a memory of her own words: "And I'll think of you, and wish you were there."

"And so I do," she suddenly whispered. "So I do. Oh, I'm wicked. I'm wicked!" She was trembling, and

forgetting everything, her eyes fixed upon the wall vaguely grey before her, outside the pale ray of the lamp. Mechanically, she sipped again, and the tea ran warmly into her throat. "No, I'm not wicked," Sally argued. "I'm not. 'Tisn't wicked to love any one like I do Toby. It's wonderful. Fancy me in love! And Toby . . . well, liking me. Oo, he is strong and big. Wonder if he's brave? I should think so. You couldn't be as strong as him and not be brave. Oh, I love him." She remembered their caresses, unembarrassed and exulting. She knew what it was to be loved. She knew . . . she knew everything. Everything that made people love each other and want to be always together. Her mind persistently went on kneading into a general memory the detached memories of the evening, and she was excited and full of longing for Toby. Slowly she drank her tea, without thinking of it at all, but accepting its comfort. Her shoulders began to feel cold, and she shivered as she finished the cup.

Sally slid out of bed to replace the cup and to put out the lamp. As her hand was outstretched she thought she heard a faint noise, but a moment's startled listening reassured her. It had been nothing. She lowered the wick, and blew out the remaining small blue rim of light. Another instant, and she would have been back in bed, snuggled down in the warmth. But at that instant she heard a further sound, this time the turning of the door handle. She froze with sudden dread. In the darkness she could see nothing.

"Who's there?" she whispered.

The door must slightly have opened. She could now see it open in the gloom.

"Sally."

It was Toby. Joy took the place of fear. He was in-

side the door, and she was in his arms, and the door was closed again behind them.

"My dear," Sally was saying, in a thick little caressing voice. "My dear."

"Had to come," mumbled Toby, hoarsely. "Thought of you all alone. I wanted you. See, I had to come."

"Of course you did," murmured Sally, her spirit leaping up and up in tempestuous excitement. "Toby, you do love me? You *do* truly love me?"

She had no sense then of anything but her love for him and his love for her. She was carried right past caution and thought. She was in his arms, and she was happy. And Toby, a dim figure of burly strength, was kissing her until she was blinded and choking with excitement beyond all she had ever felt. Everything conspired to affect her—all suppressions, all knowledges, all curiosities and vanities. Nothing but caution could have restrained her, and caution was forgotten. She was vehemently moved and beyond judgment or reflection. Her one desire was to give herself to the man she loved, the man who loved her. And the opportunity was upon them as they were in the first fever of their passion.

BOOK TWO: GAGA

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i

TEN days later, Sally began her work with Madame Gala. She arrived punctually, but found Nosey before her, keeping a record of arrivals. She also found one or two other girls, who stared at her in an inquisitive fashion and went on talking among themselves. Only when a forewoman—Miss Summers—arrived did the big room take on any air of being used for work, and within five minutes all the girls were in a state of preparation. Sally saw that they all had sleeved pinafores or overalls; she had none. As she had not a farthing to buy material to make such a thing, and had only a couple of slices of break and margarine in her coat pocket for lunch, and would have to walk all the way home, Sally could not fight against the chilling of her heart which quick glances about the workroom produced. The girls were of all sorts and sizes, some of them smartly dressed and coiffed; others wearing clothes less expensive even than her own, and with a general air of not knowing how to make the best of themselves. Looking round at the faces she could see none that indicated cleverness or special intelligence. One ferrety-looking little thing seemed as though she might be either sharp or half-witted; a tall dark girl who was rather pretty and had beautiful hair used her hands with assurance; but observation did not make Sally feel ashamed of herself or of her ability. These girls could do almost as they were told, but not quite. But the pinafore was a serious question. Sally had never been used to such a thing. She had not even brought an apron.

While the others settled down, whispering among themselves and looking sharply at Sally, the forewoman, after a greeting, ignored her until she had attended to all that was more important. In her hands was the giving out of work. Sally saw that she was supposed to know what each girl could do. She also saw that some girls were favourites and others not. If she were to make progress here she must be a favourite. She must show quickly that she had the brains and could work well. It took a very short time to make her realise that. For a moment she was inclined to be over-confident; but that mood collapsed before a side glance and a titter from two of the girls. Their instinctive ridicule warned and stiffened Sally. They did not know her. She would have to prove her qualities. She then concentrated upon Miss Summers, watching how she turned, how she smiled and frowned, and how she explained what had to be done to each girl who was receiving new work. Miss Summers was a short stout woman with cat's eyes and a long nose. She licked her lips like a cat. She was inconsistent and short-tempered; but Sally afterwards found that while she was extraordinarily vain she was rarely unkind. But in general she was severe, because severity was the only course to pursue with these chattering girls, who were full of scratches and jealousies, and who would have taken advantage of weakness with rapid unscrupulousness. So the little stout woman, feline and easily exasperated, was a good person to control the room. Her kindness might be part of her vanity, but it was not assumed. She loved her work, and she was always glad to praise good work from the girls, and to encourage it by favouritism to good workers. It was not the pretty ones or the sly ones who were the favourites. It was the workers. Following each girl with her eye, Sally could not observe that at the be-

ginning; but it did not take her long to add it to her now formidable collection of facts.

When at last Sally was called to Miss Summers's side, and questioned, she walked the length of the room feeling as though her legs had no joints, and as though her shoulders were fixed. There were only eleven girls in the room besides herself, but they were all looking at her. And when she stood before Miss Summers in her little black dress she looked so slight, with her slim body and thin pale face, that several of the girls went on with their work again immediately, having lost interest in her. Sally, confronted by Miss Summers's catlike eyes, which were a gooseberry green, twisted her fingers, and blurted out:

"I'm sorry, I got no pinafore. I didn't know I had to have one."

She was relieved when Miss Summers smiled and licked her lips.

"Well, let's make you one for a start-off. Shall we?"

Sally could have fallen down, so astonished was she at this retort. Still she blurted further:

"I got no money for the material."

Again Miss Summers smiled. She might almost have given a purr. She rubbed her cold nose with the back of her hand, like a cat washing its face.

"That's all right," she said. "We'll find some stuff. It can come off your wages. I want to see what you can do, d'you see? And that's as good a way as any. I shall be able to notice how you do it, and give you a word of advice if you want it. And you won't waste much time, and you won't waste much material. And so why not? Just stand here while I get the length." As she measured the length of Sally's frock, and allowed a few additional inches for the pinafore, she sharply said in a low voice that only Sally could hear: "That's right:

never use scent. It's vulgar. From the look of you I was afraid you'd use scent and be saucy. But I'm glad you aren't."

"Oh, no, miss," answered Sally. Quite truthfully, she added: "I've never thought of using scent. I don't like it. Only common girls use it." Unconsciously she was emphasising all her sibilants.

"Well, some of the girls here do," said Miss Summers. "Hold still."

The pinafore was a simple matter for both Miss Summers and Sally; and before the morning was over Miss Summers had visited Madame Gala.

"The new little girl's a quick worker," she said. "Very clever. I think she'll be very useful."

At which Madame Gala raised her straight brows and looked piercingly at Miss Summers. If Sally could have heard and appreciated the speech as Madame Gala did she would have known that she had become a favourite at a bound. She did not even guess it, so absorbed was she in deserving commendation, until the end of the week, when she received her full wages, without deduction. She was tempted. How easy to say nothing, and take the risk of it being remembered! She could easily say she was sorry she had forgotten all about it. Then some strong impulse of honesty made her go up to Miss Summers.

"You haven't taken off the money for the pinafore," she whispered.

"That's all right," said Miss Summers. "Good girl to come to me about it."

Good girl! Sally wondered if she really was such a very good girl.

ii

She was not, morally, being a very good girl; for her mother was still in the hospital, and she and Toby were taking risks. So far there had been no discovery; but they were getting bolder, and only the day before going to Madame Gala's, when his aunt had been out for the afternoon and evening, Toby had had Sally to tea in his aunt's room, and they had sat together over a good fire, and had silently made love to each other for hours. The more love-making they had, the more they wanted, and Sally had been living all the week for the time she spent with Toby. But her mother would be coming home soon, even though she would be unable to work; and both knew that the wild ecstasy would end with her return. It was that, probably, which made them less careful, or, if not less careful, at any rate less cautious in the use of their opportunity. Sally had a dread, which she would not face, and if Toby had any dread he never told her. For all her feeling of intimacy with him, Sally never reached below his manner and his strength; and her ignorance of him it was that gave the whole relation its charm for her. He was mysterious, a compelling strength outside her, a strange man who responded to all her wishes and who loved her as she wished to be loved—brutally and dominatingly. She was dazzled and infatuated. But already, in her first days with Madame Gala, she had recovered sufficient of her old coolness to be set upon definite personal success. This was her strongest impulse. Her love was outside it, a gratification now, and not a torment. She had no sense whatever of wrongdoing; only of hostility to her mother because her mother's return would interrupt the tenour of her life. Once only she said to Toby, secure in her trust of his love and care: "Toby . . . if I have a baby, you'll . . . you'll marry me, won't you?"

And Toby gave her the necessary promise in obvious good faith. Neither, therefore, troubled about the future. They were both too anxious to live only in the exhilarating present.

But at last Mrs. Minto returned, and by that time Sally was living upon money borrowed from Mrs. Perce, her one friend and protector. Mrs. Minto could not work. She wrote to Aunt Emmy, and Aunt Emmy helped her from her prizewinnings, and for several weeks they were thus enabled to stave off want. Once Mrs. Minto was back at home the old order of parsimony was revived, and it cost them very little to keep life going on from day to day. Sally's seven shillings a week helped. And at last Mrs. Minto was allowed to go out, and Mrs. Roberson took her back. Slowly, half-starving, they managed to exist. Sally still had her evenings with Toby, with their glory dimmed; and as the weeks went on she knew that she was safe from the causes of her dread, and carried herself jauntily, and she began to earn a little extra money by working in the evenings for Miss Jubb. This meant that she saw Toby less often, and Toby now had a man friend from the works where he was employed, and was sometimes with this man Jackson. Sally had her seventeenth birthday: her figure had improved, and so had her appearance. She was still meagre, because she had not enough to eat; but some compensation of Nature allowed her to maintain her health and to mature.

One day, when she had gone to practise upon Mrs. Perce's piano, as she had not done all the time they had been away from the flat, Sally attracted Mrs. Perce's attention by singing unusually well. Her friend listened; and then looked into the room.

"What's that you're singing?" she demanded. "Suits you. You'll never be able to play the piano, Sally, because you'd have to practise every day for hours to do

that; but you've got a big voice for your body. I suppose your lungs are good. Ever heard me sing? It's like a baby crying. But that song 'The Love Path' suits you. You might do something with your voice. Not much, I expect; but something. You just try and get hold of somebody who knows about such things. Might do a turn on the Halls. You never know. If I come across anybody I'll ask them; but I don't see many people now, and what I do are all in the 'public' line. It's worth thinking about, for a girl like you, with your way to make. Unless you marry, of course; and you say you're not going to do that in a hurry. So there you are. Make the most of yourself, I say; and let the Devil go hang himself if he's a mind to it."

Sally, who had never thought of such a thing, promised. For a time she was flattered by the vision of singing to audiences. But that soon faded. She met nobody outside Madame's, except for one or two young men who spoke to her on the way home; and so she kept to her sewing and machining for Miss Jubb. It pleased her to be able to tell Toby, who, however, frowned, and did not seem pleased.

"Seems to me you're always thinking you'll do something wonderful," he said sourly. "Doesn't seem to come to much, as fur as I can see."

"Oh, doesn't it!" cried Sally. She shook herself free from him, and marched off in anger. And Toby did not follow. It was a tiff. By the next evening both were contrite, and the matter was never spoken of again. All the same, Sally remembered it. She remembered it the more unforgivingly because Toby's remark had been true. Nothing so far had happened to prove definitely that her confidence in exceptional powers was justified. He was jealous of her! Sally laughed almost scornfully. Fancy a big fellow like Toby being jealous of a little thing like

her. Men! They were all alike. All right as long as they were playing first fiddle! That was it: Toby didn't want her to have a chance at all. He wanted her always to be number two. Sally shook her head obstinately.

"All right, Master Toby!" she said to herself. There was no more in it than that—a momentary revolt;—but once the notion had arisen it began to revolve in her mind. She could not remember if she had ever told Toby of her plan to be a successful dressmaker; but what would he say to that? Would he like his wife to make money, and to have real ladies coming to her as they did to Madam? It seemed from this that he would not. He preferred to be top dog. Sally was to be nothing upon her own account—merely to fetch and carry, and do what she was told, and husband his paltry little earnings. He'd rather be poor than owe anything to his wife, in case she became bigger than himself. Was that it? Was that Master Toby's idea? If so, it was not Sally's. She suddenly understood that Toby thought of her as his wife, as his chattel; and that she had never ceased, except in the passionate excitement of their early relations, to think of herself as one who belonged to herself and was going to make some sort of life for herself. This came as a shock to Sally. She had never thought of it before. She was beginning to grow up. From that time she first began to criticise Toby. Until then he had been the burly man she loved. Her thoughts of him, as her love for him, had been merely physical. She was now to search more deeply into the needs of life, still crudely, but examiningly. It was not enough, then, to love a man if you were going to have something else to do in life besides love him. The idea was new. It puzzled her. It was something outside the novelettes she had read, and outside her own precocious thoughts. Love was love—all knew that. She loved Toby; she had given herself to

him; they were practically married; and now it appeared that something was wrong somewhere. Toby did not want her to be Sally: he wanted her to be just a sort of moon-Toby. Another girl would have wanted nothing better. Sally told herself that she was different. She went out by herself, one evening, instead of working; and walked up to Highgate. And as she went up the hill she sang to herself the ballad "The Love Path." It began:

> "When you and I go down the love path together,
> Birds shall be singing and the day so long,"

and she could play the simple accompaniment to it with very few mistakes. She remembered Mrs. Perce's words. What if she *could* do something with her voice? Did she sing well? She allowed herself to glimpse another glorious future.

In the middle of the walk Sally stopped dead.

"Oh, *doesn't* it . . ." she said aloud. "Well, we'll just *see*. We'll just see about it. That's all." And having as it were made her formal protest she resumed the journey, and arrived home tired out, ready for bed; and before she had been in bed more than two minutes she was fast asleep, dreaming of motor cars and footmen standing on the pavement with fur rugs in their hands. In her dream she was alone in the cars. Even the chauffeur had no smallest resemblance to Toby. And yet she still loved him with all her heart, and when she was with him she felt that she extraordinarily belonged to him. Love had again at last encountered ambition, and battle was joined.

iii

Dreams of luxurious motor-cars, and footmen with fur capes and long fawn-coloured overcoats, holding fur rugs to cover her knees, were now constant in Sally's mind. She saw such things occasionally in Regent Street, and loved to look in at the windows of motor broughams upholstered in fawn-coloured corduroy, with arm straps and little hanging vases of fresh flowers. The freshness of these cars was her delight. She had no notion of the income it was necessary to have in order to possess such cars, with their attendant footman and chauffeur; but that income, whatever it was, became her ideal. Money! Lots of money! With money you could have comfort. When she said that, and was warned by conventional wiseacres that money did not produce happiness, she sneered at the timid ones. "Bet *I'd* be happy," she said. "What's happiness?" She wondered what it was. For her it had been oblivion in Toby's arms. It was so no longer. That was not all she desired. It was not by any means all. And she shrank more and more strongly from a life of squalid toil such as her mother had had—such as she would still have had if Mr. Minto had been a sober man. All her life she had slaved and slaved, and now she was worn out with it. Not for Sally! She had other plans. She had gone to the West End, and the West End was in her blood. She was looking round at life with some of her old calculating determination to exploit it. The death of her father, the passion for Toby,—these had distracted her. With increasing confidence in her position at Madam's, and a new sense of what money could actually do in the way of procuring food and clothes and ordinary or extraordinary physical comforts, Sally had returned to her old faith. She began to have a little money to buy things for herself. Once or twice Miss Summers gave

her quite good-sized pieces of material, and there were always scraps to be gathered and utilized. And Sally was enabled to dress carefully. She became the smartest of the girls in the room, for she had a natural sense of smartness. The other girls did not like her, but they all envied her and admired her. It was not that she was unpopular; but that they felt in her the hard determination to get on, and were resentful of her manifest ability to achieve what she meant to do.

The other girls were all sorted out in Sally's mind. There was not one of them into whose nature she had not some biting insight. She had become so practised that she knew all their dresses (as of course all the others did, so that a new one was an event), and knew what everything they owned had cost. She could recognise anything that had been dyed, any brooch or adornment, any stockings. She would have made a good house-detective. But she never told tales. If she knew, she knew, and that was all. It was not for Sally to play the policeman. All knowledge went into her memory. It would be devastatingly produced on the occasion of a row, but Sally rarely quarrelled. With her, nothing ever came to a quarrel. There was no need for it to do so. She was neither jealous nor censorious. One does not quarrel with one who neither loves nor blames nor is stupid or too anxious to show cleverness. Sally merely "was," and the other girls knew it. For this reason she was not liked, but neither was she feared or unpopular. They did not hide things from her, but they did not show them eagerly. Sally was Sally. She enjoyed being Sally. She meant always to be Sally.

And at last there came into Sally's life, when she had been at Madame Gala's for about six months, a new interest, and a singular one. One day, when they were all working very hard, and the electric light was on, Madame

came into the workroom with another person. And this person was a young man with a grey, thin face, rather tall and stooping, with a hesitating manner, and a general air of weakness. He followed Madame Gala round the room in an idle way, nodding to several of the girls; and Sally thought he had a very attractive smile. She found him looking at herself with a pair of large soft brown eyes, like chocolate which has been in a warm place. It was a rather dumb look. A little nick came between Sally's brows. She was busy making an inventory of the young man visitor's traits, his features, his clothes. He dressed well, and he was not bad-looking. With more stamina he might have been almost handsome; but he was obviously not in good health. The stoop, the vagueness of all his movements, his soft eye, all betokened as much. Sally turned to Muriel Barrett, who worked next to her.

"Who's he?" she asked, indicating the stranger.

"That's Bertram . . . Madame's son. Mr. Merrick, his real name is. But we call him Gaga."

"Wodjer call him that for?" asked Sally. "Isn't he right in his head?"

"Oo, well one of the gels—she's gone now, Mary Smith, —made it up. She said he was Mr. Gala, you know. Then she called him Bertie Gaga, for fun; and it got to Gaga. I never spoken to him, so I don't know. Look out, he's looking at us. Oo, I believe he's got a crush on you, Sally."

Presently the young man followed his mother out of the room, and there was a little buzz when they were gone. The girls leaned together, and whispered, laughing among themselves. Muriel Barrett turned again to Sally, and became confidential. She herself was a pink, snub-nosed blonde, with untidy hair, who was always sniffing over

her work. She jerked her head at Rose Anstey, the tall dark girl whom Sally had noticed when first she came.

"Rose thought he was in love with her once," Muriel said. "Well, he was, a bit; but not as much as she thought. I mean, he used to look at her, and all that, but he never give her anything, or took her out. I think . . . you know . . . she's a bit struck on him. That's more like it. She thinks he's a very tall handsome man. Well, he's not my taste. Funny, if you're tall, I s'pose you want a tall man to fall in love with you. It's different, being small, I suppose. My Elf's only about inch taller than me. You can't hardly see there's any difference between us. If I've got my hair frizzed he looks . . ."

Muriel went on talking. Sally took a glance at Rose, who, with eyes downcast, was sewing rapidly. Sally wished she had known that about Rose and Gaga while he was in the room: then she would have been able to look at Rose and make up her mind about that affair. She did not suppose really that there was anything in it, either way. Muriel was a little fool—like a little pink pig. That was just what she was like. And she chattered like a monkey. She had said that because he looked at her twice Gaga had got a crush on Sally. Well, Sally didn't mind. He could have any old crush he liked, for all she cared. Gaga was dismissed from her immediate attention, although she sometimes recollected a pair of soft brown eyes, that made her want to say "Moo" as if in response to their dumb longing.

The outcome of this visit, which occurred towards the end of May, was a day's outing for the girls at the beginning of June. They all went into the country by train, on a day which at first promised to be typical of all days unfortunately chosen for staff outings, but which cheered up later and became brilliantly fine. Only the girls were there, with Miss Summers and another forewoman,

Miss Rapson, to see that nobody fell into mischief. They had a good picnic lunch in woods, and ran or walked or sat about all the afternoon, until it was time for tea. They then trooped into an hotel in which a room had been engaged, and scrimmaged for places round a big table. The tea was an enormous meal: Sally, who had not hitherto enjoyed herself any more than most of the other girls had noisily done, felt herself grown to twice her normal size. It was the biggest meal she had ever eaten, and there were cream and milk and sugar, and there were cakes and lettuce and jam and all sorts of other encouragements to appetite. And every time anybody laughed the sound went up to the varnished rafters, and billowed so much that the two elder women had at last to break in upon a laughter competition. Sally held aloof from the laughter, scornfully regarding the laughers. She had been rather serious all day.

And when the noise and fun were at their height Madam and Gaga and another man and woman came into the room, having motored to the hotel, taken their tea in another room, and determined to join the party. The tea had been so late, and so prolonged, that it was already nearly eight o'clock, and as the sky had grown overcast and the day was drawing to a close the lights suddenly popped up to illumine the faces of both feasters and visitors. A piano was opened at the far end of the room, and the woman who was with Madam sat down at it and began to play. But only one or two of the girls danced: the others had eaten too much to be able to do so. Then Rose sang a song, in which she said that her heart was aching and breaking at somebody's forsaking, and the girls looked at one another significantly; and there were more songs, and the girls sat back in their chairs with flushed faces, and each of them in turn seemed to be doing something to entertain the party. With a

bored feeling, Sally was sipping her last cup of tea, when she became aware that Gaga had taken the chair next to her, and with his chocolate eyes was looking pleadingly into her face.

"Don't *you* sing?" he asked. "I wish you'd sing."

"I got no music," said Sally.

"Mrs. Roach would be able to make an accompaniment. She understands music very well—if you hummed her a song. I wish you'd sing."

Sally rose to her feet. The other girls all watched her with narrowed eyes. She was wearing such a pretty dress of light grey cotton poplin that she looked smarter than ever, they thought—in fact, almost pretty. She went close to the piano, and spoke to the pianist. "Oo, *swank!*" whispered the girls, when they saw that Sally was to play her own accompaniment. It was a thing none of them could have done.

"'When you and I go down the love path together,
Birds shall be singing and the day so long . . .'"

sang Sally, in her clear voice, and made everybody arch their brows in surprise.

"'Your heart mine, and mine in your keeping,
List while I sing to you love's tender song.
Ah, love, have done with your repining,
See how the day is clear;
Heart of my heart,
On your fond heart reclining
Dear, oh my Dear . . .'"

She played with care, and struck no false notes. She sang her best. Her voice was the best voice of the afternoon, a mezzo-soprano, but with clear upper register and a

fulness that suggested training. It was not a great performance, but it thrilled the others. Sally had triumphed. With one accord the girls clapped.

"My best worker," said Miss Summers, rubbing her cold nose and turning to the accompanist of the afternoon.

"A clever little girl," agreed her neighbour.

But Gaga was stupefied. He had remained in the chair next to Sally's, and when she resumed her place his mouth was still open with delight and admiration. Again he leaned forward, and she met his melting chocolate eyes.

"That was beautiful," he said, in a low tone of commendation. "Beautiful!"

"Glad you liked it," she said, almost brusquely. Instinctively she shot a glance in Rose's direction. Rose, her cheeks mantling, was observing the two with interest. Sally's brain clicked an impression, and she listened to a stammering from Gaga which aroused her contempt. "He's hardly a man at all," she thought. "He's soppy. Rose can have him. I wish her joy of him. She can have him—and twenty like him, if she wants . . . I don't know so much about that. Why should she? She's stuck up. Why shouldn't I have some fun, if I want to? It's nothing to do with Rose Anstey what I do, and what Gaga does . . ."

Her demand was unanswerable, because it was addressed to one who did not habitually withdraw herself lest she should give pain to others. If Rose was jealous, that showed the sort of cat she was. And in any case, who was Rose? Sally was bright in her responses to the soft voice, so that Gaga was pleased; but the girls could all see that her manner was cool, and not the flustered eagerness of a beggar. Rose's neighbour whispered. When the evening was over and Gaga and his mother had gone, and the girls had all piled into two rail-

way compartments, somebody, whose voice was unrecognisable in the darkness, called from the other carriage:

"What price Gaga on the love path? Whey!"

There was great laughter. Even Sally joined in it. Going home, the other girls in her carriage all insisted upon hearing the song again, and as they all had the quick ear of Cockneys they could sing it in chorus by the time the train reached its journey's end. Sally had become, for a time, the heroine of the occasion. Only Rose, in the other carriage, had made her protest against the song and its singer.

"Love path!" she said, in a warm voice of indignation. "She's nothing but a cocket—a white-faced cocket. That's what she is. She nothing but a white-faced cocket, that Sally Minto!"

From that time onward that was Sally's name among the girls—"Cocket," or "White-faced Cocket." Rose had coined the phrase which would stick. When Sally heard her name the next day, through Muriel's indiscretion, she looked over at Rose with pinched nostrils and a little dry smile. She was flattered. The name was the product of Rose's jealousy and injured vanity; but it was life to Sally, for it was a testimony—the first she had ever had—to her charm and her dangerousness.

iv

She did not tell Toby the next night about her singing. She rather carefully refrained from telling him, not out of considerateness, but from a sort of scorn for his jealousy. To herself she said "Anything for a quiet life." Toby never dreamed that such a person as Gaga existed, any more than he guessed at any of Sally's encounters with young men on the way home. Sally had discretion. Had he been a lover, she might have told him; but

as he was more to her than that she saw no reason to arouse his jealousy. And really, if a man spoke to her, and looked all right, where was the harm in letting him walk a little way with her? She never made appointments, and after a time, when they found she could take care of herself, and did not want a non-committed male friend, these fellow-pedestrians soon left her alone. For Sally, each of them was practice. To mention them to Toby would have been to give them all too great importance. And he might have made a fuss, and unnecessarily interrupted her fun. "Where ignorance is bliss," thought Sally, "'tis folly to call out the guard." And, further, "Let sleeping dogs lie until the milk is stolen." And so Toby pursued his own path, and never knew a tenth of what went on in Sally's life and mind. Compared with Sally, he knew nothing at all. She grew each day more *rusée*, more cunning in knowledge of the world. And Toby blundered where he should have been most astute. It was his fate.

Sally told him about the outing, because she saw he was in a gloomy mood on the day—a Sunday—after the girls' treat. She described it at length as they walked in Waterlow Park, hanging on to his arm, and all the time searching his tell-tale face and guessing at the cause of his manifest depression. She told about the picnic and the woods, and the tea, and the journey home; and she saw his mouth slightly open as he grunted. She could see the tiny points of hair that were beginning to make a perceptible blueness upon his chin, and the moulding of his cheek, and a little patch of fine down upon his cheek bone, and the hair at his temples which she had so often kissed. And she knew by his averted eye that something was the matter with him. She began to try drawing him on the subject—his aunt, had he heard from his mother (who had married again when Toby was a baby,

and lived with her husband in the North), what had he been doing at the Works? Ah! That was it. Toby had started, and frowned. It was something at the Works. Oh, he was easy for Sally to read!

"What's the matter?" she suddenly asked. Toby flushed and scowled down at her, very dark and ugly in his irritation, his mouth twisted.

"Matter?" he demanded. "What d'you mean? Nothing's the matter."

"That's why you're so cheerful, I suppose," retorted Sally. "At the Works, I mean." Toby gave her a quick, angry look in which there was an admixture of fear and suspicion.

"There's *nothing* the matter," he said, in a tyrannic voice.

"Have you got the sack?" Sally was merciless. She replied to his tyrannic voice with one as hard and stabbing as a gimlet. "Ah, I thought that was it. What you been doing?"

"Nothing," said Toby. "And anyway, what's it to do with you?"

"Well, I'm out walking with you. See? And I got to do all the talking. See? And if you're going to be surly I'll go home by myself. That's what it's got to do with me. And, besides, it *is* something to do with me, and don't you forget it. You got no right to keep things from me."

Toby was cowed by her handling of him. He might be strong, but brains are always more potent than muscle in such circumstances. And men are always afraid of the women they love.

"Yes, I got the push," he defiantly said.

"And what's *that* for?" demanded Sally, with the severity of a mother to her baby. There was no answer. "What's *that* for?" she repeated. "Come on, Toby,

you'll feel better if you tell me about it. Toby, d'you love me? Well, there's nobody about . . . quick!" They kissed, and her arms had been round his neck, and Toby was her sheepish, scowling, smiling slave. Sally had a faint consciousness of joy in her power.

"Well, you see . . ." he began, haltingly. "Jackson and I . . . we been . . . well, we wanted to make a bit, you see. And—tiddent *his fault,* but he . . ."

"Been pinching stuff," said Sally. "Clumsy. Got found out. Well?"

"Well, they found out about me, too."

"What had *you* been doing?"

"I never took anything; but I found a lot of old things among the rubbish, and I showed them to Jackson. Well, they asked him if anybody had been with him; and he said 'no.' "

"That was all right," Sally said. "I like Jackson."

"But then the man he'd been dealing with said Jackson had talked about his 'mate.' And they knew that was me. And I . . . told 'em a tale."

"*I* bet!" cried Sally, scornfully. "And got caught in it, too. Badly!"

"Well, they fired us both yesterday, and said we was lucky they didn't prosecute."

"Did they pay you? What you going to do now?"

"I dunno." Toby stared stubbornly before him. "Get something else, I suppose. Jackson's going for a sailor. Guess I'll do that, too."

"Go for a sailor?" demanded Sally, with a heart that went dump into her boots. "What d'you want to do that for?"

"I'd be with Jackson, see, if I went for a sailor."

"And what about me?" Sally's voice was no longer hard or dry. "D'you want to leave me? Are you tired of me, Toby? I believe you are. Are you?"

"No, I'm not. And I don't want to leave you. But if I went for a sailor I'd make a bit of money, perhaps, and then after a little while I could come back and begin again. It would get over having no reference. They'd say 'Where you been working?' and I'd say 'Been at sea for the last year." Then they wouldn't know anything but what I told 'em. I wouldn't go long voyages, Sally. Only just short ones. I'd often come home, and we'd have a spree."

Sally's quick brain was at work. She did not want him to go; but if he went, and if she saw him often, in spite of his being away, perhaps it would not be so bad.

"But suppose you got wrecked?" she exclaimed.

"Rot. D'you suppose every ship gets wrecked? Don't be a fool!"

"No. But yours might get wrecked. How am I to know, supposing there's a storm? It won't not get wrecked because you're on it. Would you come home very often? Would you wear sailor clothes? Wonder how you'd look! Oh, I know—you mean a jersey. Would it have letters across your chest? Where d'you have to go?"

Sally was so interested that she was even making up Toby's mind for him. By the time they went in it was decided that he and Jackson were going to sea, and that Sally should be taken down to visit his ship if it happened to be at the Docks or at Tilbury. She had dancing visions of Toby in a navy blue jersey, with "Queen of the Earth" or "La Marguerite" or "Juanita" across it in white letters. She could see his dark hair blown by the wind, and the veins in his wrists standing out as he hauled a rope. It was rather fun! she thought. "My boy's a sailor." She would be able to touch him for luck. Sailors were

lucky. She sang to herself a song one of the workgirls knew:

"Sailors are lads. Sailors are lads.
Sailors they make you laugh!"

Before night she was wholly reconciled to the idea that Toby would go to sea. She soon had a dim perception of the fact that it would do him good to go. It would get him away from the atmosphere of the Works, where there seemed to be a lot of stupid larking and work-dodging. Now that he was dismissed she began to realise all this. She was glad he was away from it. She was glad he was going to sea. It would be a complete change. It would do him good. He had been fiddling about too long at the Works, in his overalls and in the grime and oil and general dodginess of the place. The ship would take him about, and show him the way people did things. It would open his eyes and his brains. Electrically, something self-protective within her added the further message: it would keep him out of the way for a time. Sally breathed deeply. An unreadable smile was upon her lips, and no smile at all was in her eyes. Afar off she scented change; but what manner of change she did not as yet recognise. It was her instinct at work, her instinct for turning life to her own advantage. It was an infallible instinct, like that of birds for a coming storm.

V

It was some weeks before Sally again saw Gaga, and this time he came into the premises of Madame Gala one Saturday morning. Sally had taken something in to Madam, and was waiting her judgment, when one door opened and Gaga came in. He was dressed, as usual, in a morning coat and top hat, and his trousers

were creased to an inconceivable point of accuracy. Besides which, his tailors had been able to do what most tailors cannot achieve; the creases arrived at the precise centre of Gaga's fawn spats. Sally was not such an expert in male clothing to recognise from this that Gaga's tailors were supermen; but she could tell that he looked like a gentleman of leisure. She was the more astonished, therefore, to see him carrying a parcel of some size under his arm. His mother was evidently quite as astonished.

"What on earth's that, Bertie?" she demanded. Gaga looked at her in a timid way.

"Oh—er—it's . . . it's a new fertiliser," he said. "I . . . I'm going to take it on to the office after lunch. Goodmayes is coming back then. Perrip says it's wonderful stuff, and I want Goodmayes to go into it. We're going into all that matter—good morning, Miss Minto—this afternoon. I . . . I think we may be able to get through quite a lot. You see, as it's Saturday, we shan't be interrupted. . . ."

"That will do, Sally," said Madam, gravely and slowly nodding her head in dismissal.

Sally went with regret. She had been interested in the conversation. She had taken it for granted that Gaga did nothing for a living. Now he talked of going to an office, and of two men whose opinions he evidently valued, and of fertiliser; and although his words and his manner were still those of a hesitating man he did not speak as an absolute fool. Sally felt a stir of curiosity. What sort of business was it that he was in? Fertiliser . . . wonderful stuff . . . something to do with gardening, would it be? As she was closing the door, Sally looked back and saw mother and son standing together. The likeness was remarkable. Both were tall, grey-faced, and slightly stooping. Gaga was weak-looking for a

man, and Madam had more severity; but there were such lines upon her face that she looked like an old woman. A sudden realisation shook Sally. As she went back to Miss Summers with an explanation of Madam's deferred judgment she had this sharp new knowledge about Madame Gala.

"Well *she* won't live for ever," thought Sally, definitely.

And then she had recourse to her usual informant, Muriel, and asked her Gaga's business. Muriel did not know. Sally was therefore left to conjecture. She forgot all about Madam and Gaga, for Toby was going to meet her after business on his first leave from the "Florence Drake." She was dressed in her most destructive raiment, had searched the skies for rain, and was watching the clock. So fertilisers went the way of all secondary things, and Toby became her dominating thought. He had become the more splendid by his absence. She imagined him standing in the street below, dressed equally in his best clothes, and looking the finest boy on earth. They were going into Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, and he had promised to take her in a boat on the Serpentine, if one could be hired, and somewhere to tea, and at night to the Marlborough Theatre in Holloway Road. It was worth while to lose him for a time in order to recover a Toby more dear, and so much more extravagant on her behalf. He explained his generosity by the fact that he would be drawing his wages that day. Good to be a sailor, and have your money in a lump like that! Sally thought she would not altogether mind if he remained at sea for a time. He could save, and she could get on; and then they would both be happy, with a house somewhere, and a maid, and everything spick and span. No babies. Sally had taken that to heart, and she appreciated the value of old Perce's advice. A girl who want-

ed to get on did not need babies to drag her down. She wanted freedom.

As the clock slowly crawled to the hour of liberation all the girls began to put away their things, so that a real busyness was observable in the room. Sally was apparently no more eager than the others, and yet she could hardly keep herself from running to the window to see if Toby was in the street below. Sedately she prepared to leave, walking down the stairs slowly instead of rushing at them as she wished to do. She buttoned her little gloves, and set her hat straight, and made herself appear nonchalant. And that was how it happened that Gaga overtook her at the front door, and stood with her for a moment upon the doorstep.

"Lovely day it is," Gaga said, agreeably. "You going to get away?"

"Away? Oh, no, I'm going home," Sally said brightly. Then, looking at him, she saw that there was nothing to disturb the impression that he was a gentleman of leisure. "Oh Mr. Ga— Mr. Bertram . . . you haven't got your parcel!" she cried.

He slapped one hand upon the other, with a most dramatic gesture.

"Idiot!" he exclaimed. "Thank you *so* much, Miss Minto. You've saved my afternoon." And with that, raising his top hat, he went back up the stairs, leaving Sally to congratulate herself upon her memory and her presence of mind. For she knew the rooms would all be locked by Miss Summers before she left.

She looked round for Toby, and saw him, as fine as a bird, upon the opposite path. Crossing over, she took his arm with such pride and delight that Toby, who had been frowning as he greeted her, was almost appeased. She looked so charming in her very pale green dress with the artfully-brimmed hat that he also had looked proud

and happy at her first appearance. But Toby had received a shock. Standing there in his dark tweed suit, with a rakish Trilby hat and a fascinating cane, he had felt a fit companion for any girl, and as he was shaven, and his square face was browned with the sun and the sea wind, he had been content. And then Sally, looking like a princess . . .

"Who the devil's that silly fop?" he demanded, jerking his head.

Sally gave a jump, and a mischievous peep up into Toby's brown face.

"Jealous?" she asked. "That's right: be a man. They're never happy unless they're jealous. That's Gaga. And if you want to know who Gaga is, he's Madam's son. See?"

"Well, he'd better not come fooling around you," growled Toby. "Or he'll get a thick ear. With his top hat and his kid gloves and all."

"Hark at it!" jeered Sally. "Quite the little man! Don't you think he awfully good-looking, Toby? We're all mad about him. All us girls."

"No, I don't," said Toby, deliberately. "But I expect he's the sort the girls like. Well, he's got a harem there, and no mistake, all fussing round him. Is he there all the time?"

"No. Toby, what's fertilisers?" Sally's curiosity had been revived. "Don't you know? Oh, shut up about Gaga. Anybody'd think he was a devil. He isn't. He's soppy. He wouldn't dare to make love to any of us girls. If I was to look at him he'd run away."

"Yes," said Toby, grimly. "I see he didn't like you looking at him."

"Well, I'll tell you something else, Toby," added Sally, with a persuasively dry candour. "If Madam was to see me looking at him I should get the sack—spiff! See?"

Toby was impressed. More, he was silenced. They spent a happy afternoon and evening, with no further reference to Gaga. Nor did Sally think of Gaga during the whole of the weekend. He might have been mixed and pounded with his own fertiliser for all she cared. For Sally had Toby.

vi

One night Miss Summers and Sally were working late upon a "rush job," and Madam was also in her room. The girls had all gone; but Sally had been chosen by Miss Summers to help her, and Sally was always ready to do this because it meant a small addition to her weekly money. Madam was doing her books, and Gaga was helping her. Sally was sewing busily—beautiful fine work that caused Miss Summers to purr and lick her lips with relish;—and as they worked they exchanged remarks which would have been impossible if they had not been alone. Miss Summers always spoke of the business, which absorbed her, and Sally gleaned innumerable details in this way, without seeming to be doing such a thing. She, on her side, gave Miss Summers a low-toned picture of her own life, concentrating upon domestic circumstances and enhancing Miss Summers' respect for her bravery and her willingness. When they had been silent once for a little while, and Sally had finished the first of her difficult and gratifying tasks, Sally fell into thought, and at last said to Miss Summers:

"Wish I knew about accounts. I don't know anything. Is it hard to learn?"

Miss Summers shook her plump face, and rubbed the tip of her nose with the back of her hand.

"No," she reassuringly said. "It's easy. You know what twice one are? Well, that's all it is. You put down

on one side how much you charged, and when you get the money you put it down on the other side, and draw a line to show they balance. And every month or every quarter you go through your books, and see who hasn't paid; and if it isn't anybody special you send them a fresh account. And if it's a real lady you don't worry her. You have to know who's who in a business like this. That's the chief thing."

"Does Gaga—Mr. Bertram know who's who?"

"No!" Miss Summers's tone was conclusive. "But his mother tells him who to write to, or who to send an account to, and he knows bookkeeping, and how much is at the bank; and he draws cheques for her to sign, and that sort of thing. Between you and me, Sally—mind, this is *quite* between ourselves,—I don't think Mr. Bertram's got a very good head for figures. You have to be a bit smarter than he is. Of course, he's very kind and good-looking; but if I wanted good sound common sense I wouldn't go to him. Not a good head for figures. He's not very sharp. Now Madam's as sharp as a needle. It's funny how a really sharp woman sometimes has a son who's—well, not so sharp. . . ."

"Would you say *I* was sharp?" asked Sally innocently.

"Like a knife," declared Miss Summers, with a quick dart of her feline eyes.

"Really?" Sally was eager. She gave a little chuckle of pleasure at such emphatic praise.

"You'd be able to do the books, but you're better where you are. When you've been here another three months, Sally, you'll be getting more money. It isn't only that you're a good worker, and quick, but you've got more sense than the other girls. I oughtn't to say this to you. I don't generally praise the girls here. But if you want to get on, you've only got to stay where you are. You'll find Madam appreciates you. And so do I."

"You've been awfully good to me," murmured Sally, with downcast eyes. "I'm not just saying that, Miss Summers; I mean it, every word. When I came here I didn't know anything; and now I don't know a lot; but . . ." She gave a small cluck of her tongue, and a smile, to show how much she had learned. It was true. And she was even learning to speak better, through listening to Madam and Miss Summers and at times a customer; and she had enough sense to avoid the extravagant refinements of Nosey. Presently she resumed: "Miss Summers, what does Mr. Bertram do? He's got a business of his own, hasn't he?"

Miss Summers looked across at the door leading to Madam's room, and lowered her voice.

"It's only something Madam put him into. It's a business all to do with farms."

"Farms?" Sally laughed. "Well, *he* doesn't look much like a farmer."

"No, it isn't exactly farms; but chemical things they use on farms. Now you see there's the soil." Sally nodded, so deeply interested that she ceased her work. "Some soil's good for growing things, and some isn't. Well, when a soil's not good the farmers mix stuff with it, to make it better."

"I know," cried Sally, joyously. "Fertiliser."

"Yes. And then from the good soil they'll get a crop early in the year, and then, by using stuff, they'll get another crop later. All that sort of thing. And if cows have the mange, or the rickets, or whatever it is cows have, Mr. Bertram's got something to give them. D'you see what I mean? And all sorts of chemical things. Stuff to kill weeds, stuff to give chickens to make them have bigger eggs. . . . He's got an inventor, and a manager, and others who are interested in the business, and he's got a share, and he goes to the office and goes about the

country sometimes." Miss Summers screwed up her nose and lips, looking very like an old pussy, and in a whisper added: "Doesn't really do very much." She put her finger to her lips at that, and Sally, resuming her work, reassured her by a glance. "Of course," said Miss Summers, "he's very agreeable, and good-looking, and he's got plenty of money."

Money! Sally's eyelids flickered. She gave a charming grin.

"Wish I'd got plenty money," she said.

"You will have," answered Miss Summers, confidently. "Don't fret. Your time's coming. You're young yet, and all sorts of things might happen to you."

Sally made no response. She fell into silence for a time. She had learnt with the greatest interest about Gaga's business, and about the books. She learned a great deal from Miss Summers, whom she had grown to like very much. She was by no means insensitive to kindness, although she was not sentimental over it. And, as she thought, she came round again to the two workers in the next room.

"D'you think Madam will live long?" she unexpectedly asked.

vii

Within half an hour the job was finished, and Miss Summers took it in to Madam. She closed the door after her, and so Sally could not hear what was said. She stood up, stretching her arms, and looking down into the street, for it was barely growing dusk, and she could see a few men and women walking along in either direction. She yawned slightly, raising her hand to her mouth, her muscles stiff. And as she stood thus she heard the door opened and closed again, and, still yawning, said sleepily:

"Oo, I'm *so* tired!"

"Are you?" she heard behind her, in a very soft and sympathetic voice. Sally wheeled.

"I thought it was Miss Summers," she cried.

Gaga stood there smiling shyly, and looking at her with his appealing eyes. In this light he looked very handsome, and Sally felt almost sorry to see that he also looked tired. His face was quite grey, and his movements were those of an exceedingly nervous person who would always shrink from roughness.

"I'm so sorry you should have had to work so late," he said.

"Oo, it's nothing," cried Sally. "Do me good. If I was at home I should only be working there," she added, explanatorily. "Work, work, work."

"Don't you ever get any fun?" asked Gaga, timidly. "I mean, go out, or anything?"

Sally shook her head. She was silhouetted against the light.

"No," she told him. "Not often." It was strange how refined her voice automatically became when she was talking to Gaga. She was altogether restrained. "You can't if you've got to earn your own living. And have to get here early in the morning."

Gaga hesitated, half turned away, came back.

"I'm very sorry," he said, in his gentle, weak way. "Don't you like it? I mean going out. Or is it just that you don't get the chance? Poor little girl. Er—I'm sorry. Er—it's a beautiful night, isn't it?"

"Lovely," agreed Sally. "I'm going to walk home."

He considered that. He did not seem to have anything more to say. Sally moved to her place, and mechanically put away her scissors and thimble. She was still in her pinafore, and she could not take that off and roll it up while Gage was in the room. So they stood there, separated by several yards. He took out a cigarette case,

and lighted a cigarette, throwing the match under the long table at the side of the room.

"Yes," he said reflectively. "Are you going to have dinner first?"

"Me?" laughed Sally. She shook her head. "When I get home. If I had dinner in London it would take all my wages, and more, at a single go." She laughed again, but not woundingly.

Gaga looked at his shoes, again at Sally, again at his shoes.

"Look here," he blurted out, "I wish you'd . . ."

Sally's ears were pricked; but they heard only the opening of the door of Madam's room as Miss Summers returned. Both Sally and Gaga turned away, as if in slight chagrin. Then Gaga backed out of the workroom. The conversation was over. It was time to go home. Slowly Sally removed her pinafore and rolled it, thinking rapidly. Miss Summers was so pleased at Madam's satisfaction with the dress that she was beaming and purring and rubbing her hands together. She nodded benevolently at Sally.

"Well, you get off, Sally," she said, in a full tone of delight. "It's quite all right. Madam's very pleased with the dress. Don't hang about now, but get home to your supper. You've been a very good girl."

Sally put on her hat.

"Good night, Miss Summers." And as she passed the door of Madam's room she gave a little silent nod towards it, and a little grimace also. She was out upon the stairs. She was out of doors. And as she walked along she heard rapid footsteps behind her, shrank a little, and looked up to see Gaga standing beside her, quite breathless, as if with a hurried journey.

"Er—Miss Minto," he panted. "I'm sorry . . . I . . . will you take these? Er—good night."

He raised his hat, and went into the building, leaving Sally mutely clasping a box of chocolates which he had thrust into her hand. She looked round, but he had disappeared, and she began to march homeward, still clasping the chocolates. Only when she was in Regent Street with her treasure did Sally dare to laugh. Then the whole scene came back to her so vividly that she could control her mirth no longer, but stared, shaking, into a shop window. He must have hurried out to buy the chocolates after being interrupted by Miss Summers.

"My!" she whispered to herself. "My!" For a time that was all she could say; but as she resumed her journey she exclaimed: "Chocolates! He never gave Rose anything at all. Ee! He was going to ask me to dinner. Wish he had! He didn't dare! My word, he hasn't half got a crush on me! Old Gaga!" She was consumed with delighted laughter, that made her break into smiles at intervals during the whole of the dismal walk which followed.

viii

"Here, have a chocolate, ma," said Sally. Mrs. Minto was sitting beside the empty grate reading, with the aid of a magnifying glass, a piece of newspaper which had been wrapped around Sally's mended shoes. She looked very frail and meagre, but she was very much better than she had been, and but for the ugliness of the room and the drabness of her clothes she would not have appeared miserable. She was, in fact, a pathetic figure; but thanks to Sally they were no longer starving, or in immediate danger of it.

"Chocolates!" cried Mrs. Minto. Then, sternly and suspiciously, she said in her weak voice of warning, "Where did you get *them* from, Sally?"

"Won 'em in a raffle," declared Sally.

"Oo, gambling!" reproved Mrs. Minto. "It's very wrong of young girls——"

"Fiddlesticks! They're good chocolates, too," said Sally. "Don't make yourself sick. It's a nuisance. Besides, I want some myself. I *am* hungry. I've been working all the evening."

"Working!" grumbled her mother, incredulously.

"Well . . . I . . . *have!*" asserted Sally. "Perhaps you'd like me to get Miss Summers to give me a certificate? You'll see. I shall have a bit more money at the end of the week. Then you'll rub your eyes. You'll apologise—I don't think! No, I'm a bad girl, wasting my time gadding about. You never think of that when you get the money, or the money if I'm late."

"Hush! Hush!" begged her mother. "I never said you was a bad girl. You're a very good girl. But when you bring home a box of chocolates at this hour—nine o'clock, and past—and say you won them in a raffle, and you've been working—well!"

"What's that you're reading?" asked Sally, pointing to the small print.

Mrs. Minto straightened the sheet of newspaper, and held it up to the light.

"It's an old paper," she said. "A trial."

"Lor! Murder?" Sally almost left her supper. "What's it all about?"

"Well . . . oo, he must a been a wicked wretch. He poisoned the old lady. He'd robbed her before he did it. Took all her money to give her an annuity, and then he poisoned her."

"Poison! Whew! What sort of poison?"

"Flypapers, it was. Not them sticky ones, but the brown, what you put in water. Got arsenic in them, they have."

"What's arsenic?"

Mrs. Minto looked over her magnifying glass at Sally in a bewildered way.

"I don't know. It's poison. I never poisoned anybody. Not that I know of."

"No," agreed Sally. She thought to herself: "She ought to have poisoned dad. All of us." Melancholy seized her, a dreadful passing fit of depression. Suddenly she longed for Toby. Aloud, she proceeded, more seriously: "If it's in the flypapers, why don't we all get poisoned, ma?"

"Well, it seems he soaked the papers, and drained off the water, with the poison in it, and mixed it with her food—beef tea, and that. *She* never noticed anything. She had awful pains, and diarrhœa, and was sick; and then she died, poor thing."

"Hn," said Sally, reaching out for the chocolates. "I'll read it. I like murders."

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Minto, in horror. "Read them—yes; but say you like murders! What wicked people there are in the world, to be sure. I hope they hanged him."

"Doesn't it say?" mumbled Sally, dealing with a chocolate with caramel inside it.

"It's torn across. It's what I got your shoes in, Sally. It's a . . . It's 'Stories of Famous Trials,' in the Weekly Something . . . I can't see what it is."

For the next quarter of an hour Sally ate chocolates and read about the trial of Seddon for murdering Miss Barrow.

"Miss Barrow!" she exclaimed. "Wonder if she was any relation to old Perce! I'll ask Mrs. Perce about it. Oo—fancy Tollington Park! Quite near us in Hornsey Road."

Mrs. Minto shuddered, and looked furtively at the

clock, longing for her bedtime. Sally caught the glance, shut up the box of chocolates, and folded the paper.

"You going to work?" asked her mother.

"Wash my hair."

"You're always washing . . . *washing,* you call it!" cried Mrs. Minto.

Sally ignored the sneer, and proceeded to her occupation. There was a silence. Mrs. Minto yawned. She looked at Sally making her preparations, and into her face came a watchful anxiety that was mingled with profound esteem. There was a *chic* about her girl that made Mrs. Minto assume this expression quite often, and Sally knew it. She knew it now, and was elaborately unconscious of it. As she waited for the kettle and moved the lamp so that it would illumine the washstand, she whistled to show how blind she was to any sign of emotion from her mother. When the whistle was unavailing, she said sharply:

"Don't you think this is a pretty frock, ma?"

Mrs. Minto sighed heavily, and pulled herself up out of her chair.

"Far *too* pretty, if you ask me," she said. "Looks to me fast." She was full of concern, and did not try to hide it from Sally.

"Oo!" cried Sally. "You *are* stupid, ma!" And with that she whipped the dress over her head and revealed the fact that she wore no petticoat. Her mother was the more outraged.

Sally began to sing.

> " 'When you and I go down the love path together,
> Stars shall be shining and the night so fair.' "

"Well, it's a good thing nobody else sees you like that," sniffed her mother, rebukingly. "I don't know what they *would* think!"

Sally forebore to make the obvious retort. Her mother prepared for bed.

ix

For the next fortnight Sally did not see Gaga, and only at the end of the period did she learn that he had been away from London on business. This was one of the journeys of which Miss Summers had spoken, to the agricultural districts. Sally could not discover whether Gaga actually acted as traveller for his own firm; but she gathered that he found it useful to see how the country was behaving itself in the matter of agriculture. She suspected also that he went away for his health. She speculated as to what he looked like with his handsome coat off, and recalled wrists that could have been spanned with ease by her own small fingers. In contrast, when she saw Toby, she saw with swelling pride how big his hands were, and felt his already increased muscles. Once he swung her clear from the ground with one arm, so that her feet kicked against his leg in helplessness. He was getting stronger and stouter than ever, and his eyes were clear and his skin tanned and smoothed by the breeze. She adored him. He wanted her to go away with him during one of his leaves; but Sally did not dare to go, because her mother had been specially grumbling and suspicious. So they saw each other rarely for the rest of the year, and their meetings became the more precious for that reason.

Soon after Gaga returned, Madam went away. She had had no holiday, and she had fallen ill, with headaches and bilious attacks and a threat of jaundice. So it happened that Gaga came each day to the dressmaking establishment and took charge of the cash and the accounts, while Miss Summers and Miss Rapson interviewed any customers who came about dresses. Miss Rapson, a tall,

thin, dark woman, was in another room, with eight girls under her; but Miss Summers was really in charge while Madam was away, because she understood the whole business, and was a more experienced woman than Miss Rapson. Sally had hardly ever seen Miss Rapson until this time, so much did she keep to her own room; but now, when the two who were in charge had to arrange their work together, there was more interchange. Sally had often to go into the other room with messages or work, and she came to understand very quickly what went on there. Miss Rapson was strict, and rather disagreeable. Her girls were like mice, unless she was absent; and her sallow face gave the clue to her disagreeableness. She did not like Sally at all, because she was jealous of her. Sally was quick to perceive this, but she did not retaliate. She formed her own cool conclusions about Miss Rapson. She understood the complexion, and she was more concerned with the details of the work than with anything else. Besides, she was in a strong position. She had nothing to fear from Miss Rapson. She soon recognised that she had not much to learn from her, either. Miss Rapson was forty, angular, shortsighted. She was inclined to be fussy and self-important and lacking in self-reliance. If anything went wrong she lost first her head and then her temper. "Hysterics!" thought Sally, cruelly. And Miss Rapson was very anxious indeed to have the reversion of Miss Summers' place of trust. She had set her heart upon it, although she knew that as Miss Summers was no older than herself, and as little likely to marry, she might fruitlessly wait a lifetime. Anything which suggested a possible rival, even though it might only be in the distant future, was a cause of sleeplessness to her, and after a sleepless night, when all possible causes of grief, summoned from memory and the inventions of her own unquiet spirit, came into her

head, Miss Rapson was one of the most insufferable women in the dressmaking. "If I was boss here," thought Sally, "and I had any trouble with her, she'd go like a shot. Easily get someone in *her* place." But she did not show that she was thinking this. She said: "Yes, Miss Rapson. No, Miss Rapson. I'll tell Miss Summers, Miss Rapson," in the most respectful way. It was Miss Rapson who first suspiciously sounded Miss Summers about Sally. "Do you think she's *deep*?" she asked.

Now that Miss Summers had more to do, Sally was very useful to her. Also, Sally came to admire Miss Summers more than ever. She might be funny, with her eternally cold nose and her catlike appearance, but she was an extraordinarily capable woman. She rose to emergencies, which is the sign of essential greatness. Not once did Sally see Miss Summers lose her nerve. True, there was no need for diplomacy or large generalship; but when work has to be arranged so that all customers are satisfied, not only with its quality but with the promptness of its delivery, a good deal of skill and management is required. It was forthcoming; and Sally was at hand to give important aid. The weak spot in the government of the business seemed to be Gaga, who betrayed incessant vacillation, and came in so often to consult Miss Summers that she became quite ruffled and indignant with him. "Such nonsense!" she would say to Sally. "A grown up man like that asking such silly questions. Why a *girl* would do it better." She had all the capable woman's contempt for the average member of her own sex. "Girls!" she would sniff. Shrewdly, Sally watched the comedy; but for all her shrewdness she never quite understood the cause of Gaga's weakness. It was that Madam had insisted upon early obedience in days when Gaga's precocious ill-health made him pliable; and a docile child becomes a tractable boy and finally a

man who needs constant guidance. Sally only saw the last stage. She nodded grimly to herself one day. "Wants somebody to look after him," she said. "Somebody to manage him." With one of her unerring supplements, she added confidently: "I could manage him. And look after him, too, for that matter. Poor lamb!"

The extra work kept Miss Summers and Miss Rapson late almost every evening, and Sally also stayed, so that in the evenings she often saw Gaga. She even, once or twice, when Miss Summers had gone to consult Miss Rapson (who stood upon her dignity and kept to her own room), sought pretexts for going into the room where Gaga was. She went in to look at the Directory, or she pretended that she had supposed Miss Summers with him; and on these occasions she stood at the door, and talked, until Miss Summers' imminent return made her fly innocently back to her seat. She enjoyed observing Gaga's pleasure, and even excitement, at her approach. It gratified her naughty vanity and her impulse to the exploitation of others. One evening when she had thus stolen five minutes, she found Gaga ruffling his hair over an account, and at his great sigh of bewilderment she turned from the book she was needlessly consulting.

"Got a headache, Mr. Bertram?" she timidly and commiseratingly asked.

Gaga looked up at her gratefully, a comic expression of dismay upon his face. The books lay before him upon the table, and an account had been transferred from one to another. A litter of papers was also there. He was in the last stages of perplexity.

"No," he said. "It's this account. I can't make it out. See if you can."

Sally went and stood close to him, leaning over to examine the books, so that his shoulder touched her side. She knew that the contact thrilled him, and for an instant

was so occupied with the recognition that she could not collect her thoughts. He had been adding up in pencil on a sheet of paper the two series of entries, and there was a discrepancy between them. Sally checked his figures: there seemed nothing wrong with them. She herself added the two series of entries. Then, with a pointed finger she counted the entries. One of them had been omitted. Another examination showed which of them it was. She had solved his mystification. Her small forefinger pointed to that entry which accounted for the difference in the two casts. Gaga looked up at her in wondering admiration.

"What a marvellous girl you are!" he impulsively ejaculated. "I've been worrying over this for ten minutes. Thank you. Er—thank you."

Still she did not immediately leave him, and he made no attempt to move. It would have been the easiest thing for Gaga to encircle her with his arm, but he did not do so. At last Sally started away.

"I must go," she said breathlessly.

"Thank you, Miss Minto. I'm . . . I'm so much . . . obliged," stammered Gaga. She was at the door. "Oh, Miss Minto . . ." Sally turned, a mischievous expectancy upon her face. "Er . . ." Gaga swallowed. A faint colour rose to his grey cheeks. "I say, I wish you'd come out to dinner with me. I . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Bertram," murmured Sally. "It's very kind of you. I . . ."

"*Do* come. I'm . . . so much obliged to you, you know. I mean, I . . ."

Sally gave a quick nod. She peeped to see that Miss Summers had not returned.

"Well, you see," she said. Then: "All right, I will. Thank you very much."

"To-night? In half an hour? Splendid. I'l be at

the corner of the street. Just outside that big corner place. Thank you. That'll be fine." He was jubilant. Sally went back to her place with her mouth puckered into a curious smile that nobody could have understood. She felt that she had embarked at last upon the inevitable adventure with Gaga, and her sensation for the moment was one of pure triumph. A moment later, triumph was suffused with a faint derision. She thought how easy it was to handle Gaga. She felt how easy, how temptingly easy, it would be always to handle him. But all the same she was rather excited. It was the first time she had been out to dinner with a man. She knew he would look handsome and like a gentleman; she knew he would have plenty of money. She was glad to think that she was wearing her newest frock, the smartest she had. Well, she demanded of herself, why not? It'll please him, or he wouldn't have asked me! Would they have wine to drink? she wondered. A momentary self-distrust seized her in the matter of table-manners; but she shook it off. She would watch what Gaga did. She musn't drink too much. She must mind her step. Then, irresistibly: "What a lark!" murmured Sally. She was very demure upon Miss Summers' return, and listened with equanimity to a few remarks made by Miss Summers as to the capacity of Miss Rapson. In reality her thoughts were occupied with speculations as to the entertainment which lay ahead. So Gaga had never given Rose anything; more fool Rose! Rose! *She* didn't know how to manage a man! She didn't know anything at all. She had been born pretty, and she thought that was all you had to do. Sally had not been born pretty; she had had to fight against physical disadvantages. It had taught her a great deal. It had taught her the art of tactics. Sally was very much wiser than she had been a year earlier. She had learnt immeasurably from her contact with

Toby. She had kept her eyes open. She was unscrupulous. It was of no use to be scrupulous in this world; you lost all the fun of the fair. Sally was hilarious at her own irreverent unscrupulousness.

Half an hour later she slipped out, and along the street. Gaga was waiting. He raised his hat—a thing Toby would never have done if he had left her so recently—and fell into step beside her. Sally shot a bright eye full of assurance. As Gaga showed himself nervous, so her assurance increased.

"Where would you like to go?" asked Gaga.

"Oo, you know better than . . . I do," answered Sally, meekly. He stopped for a moment; then turned eastward; then stopped afresh, hesitating until Sally slightly frowned.

"Yes, we'll go to the Singe d'Or," he explained. "Unless you . . . No, we'll go to the Rezzonico. You'd like to have music, I expect. You know, it's awfully good of you to come. I've wanted to talk to you ever since I heard you sing so beautifully."

The Love Path! Sally gave a start. What had Mrs. Perce said! Sally might not have a fortune in her voice, she mischievously thought; but at least she had a dinner! Well, master Toby; and what did he think of that, if you please?

"I'm very fond of music," she said, glibly.

"I could tell . . ." There was a pause. "Do you . . . do you sing much?"

"No, not much." Sally was speaking like a lady. "Ai . . . a . . don't get very much taime. I'm very fond of. It's so . . . it's so. . . ." She was rather lost for a phrase that should sound well.

"Quite, quite," agreed Gaga, eagerly.

"I wish I could play," Sally hurried to say, feeling that she had failed in effectiveness. He was loud in protest

against her modesty. "Well, I mean, I've never—well, hardly ever—had any lessons. No, nor my voice. It's just ear. Mrs. P—— a friend of maine says I've got a very quick ear." Every now and then Sally was betrayed into Nosey-like refinement. She fought against it from an instinctive feeling that it was meretricious. But at the same time she was speaking with instinctive care, so as to avoid Cockney phrases, and pronunciations, and tones. She wanted him to think her—something that she called "nice." They walked the length of Regent Street, chatting thus; and at last reached the gilded Rezzonico, where there were liveried men who seized Gaga's hat and stick, and maîtres d'hotel who hurried them this way and that in search of a table in the crowded, din-filled room. The walls were covered with enormous mirrors which were surrounded by gaudy mouldings. Tables were everywhere, and all appeared to be occupied. Men and women in evening dress, men and women in morning clothes, some of the women painted, others ordinary respectable members of the bourgeoisie, were sitting and dining and smoking and chattering loudly. Glasses, cigarettes, bottles, all sorts of dishes, strewn upon the tables, caught Sally's bewildered eye. Above all, a scratching orchestra rasped out a selection from one of Verdi's operas. A huge unmanageable noise of talk and laughter swelled the torrent of sound. Deafened, her nerve destroyed, Sally timidly followed the apparently aimless wanderings of Gaga and the maîtres d'hotel, her shoulders stiff with self-consciousness in face of so many staring eyes and well-fed, well-dressed creatures; and at last they found a table. It was a bad table, in the middle of the room, near the band and the cash desk and a sort of sideboard into which bottles were ceaselessly dumped. A very old waiter, with white side whiskers like those of the late Emperor Franz Josef, very foreign and therefore

particularly liable to misconstrue Gaga's stammered orders, served them with hors d'oeuvres, slashing down upon Sally's plate inconceivable mixtures of white and red and green fragments; and then hurried away as fast as his bunions allowed. Gaga was left to choose the wine, which he managed to do after many consultations with Sally and the waiter, and many changes of mind upon his own account. Sally riddled all his uncertainties with a merciless eye. He apparently knew a wine-list when he saw one; but his nervousness was so palpable that she was inclined even to suspect his knowledge. It was an injustice. She soon realised that the band was too noisy for talk, and the sideboard too shattering even for coherent thought. She knew, in fact, at the first encounter, that this was a bad table, and that bad tables were to be avoided by any expert eye. She knew the waiter was a bad waiter, and that Gaga was a bad host. She had her first lesson in the art of dining out at a restaurant.

But she dined! She drank more wine than she had intended to do, and it went to her head. She laughed, and became talkative, forgetting her refined accent, and thereby enjoying herself very much more than she would otherwise have done, and becoming a good and lively companion for the meal. Gaga could not respond to her talk, because it quickly became evident that, with all the good will in the world, he could not talk; but as the wine reached his head also he began to laugh at her remarks, and to look at her with such an expression of adoration in his chocolate eyes that Sally grew more and more at ease and more and more familiar with the passing of each minute, and the increasing effect of the wine she had taken. She sparkled, less in her speech than in her exhilarated and exhilarating manner. She was all nerves, all dancing coquettry.

"*Don't* look at me like that!" she pleaded, archly.

Gaga's eyes glowed, and his mouth was stretched with laughing. "Make me feel as if . . ."

"How do I look at you? How does it make you feel?" asked Gaga with that kind of persistent seriousness with which a man talks to a pretty girl when he has drunk enough wine. "Tell me, Sally, how does it make you feel, Sally?" He reached his hand across the table, and laid it upon hers. "I mean, Sally . . . I mean, if it makes you feel . . . I'm sorry, d'you see? I look at you as I feel. I don't know how I look at you. I look at you . . ."

Gaga was not at all drunk; he was merely sententious and sentimental. Sally darted a roguish eye, first round her, and then at Gaga, enjoying very specially this stage of the meal. It was all fun to her, all flattering to her vanity, all a part of the noise and excitement and well-being that was making her spirits mount. She allowed her hand to remain under his for a moment; then tried to draw it away; then pinched his thumb gently and recovered her liberty. Gaga was unlike Toby. He had not the assurance of the physically vigorous. He was gentle, mild, stammering, and ineffective. But he was giving Sally a glorious evening's entertainment. At one step they had overleapt all that separated them, and were friends. He began to tell her, unasked, about his business, about his mother, about everything.

"My mother's a wonderful woman," he said. "Wonderful! She's made that business with her own hands. She began in a small way, and the business is almost out of her control. Not quite; but . . . She's done it all herself. All herself. Wonderful woman. And yet, you know, Sally; she's hard. I wonder if you understand what I mean? She's always been a good mother to me. I wish I could *tell* you how good. There's the business I'm in, for example. But Sally . . . I'm not a business

man. . . . If I had somebody to do the business side, I've got . . . I can design dresses. That's what I'm good at. She knows. She lets me design them, sometimes. I've got a touch, d'you see? But she's hard. She's so afraid of anybody meddling. She's made that business herself, and she won't let anybody else touch it. She has me to help her with the accounts; but, as I say, I'm not a business man. She thinks I'm a fool. *You* don't think I'm a fool, do you, Sally?"

"Me? You?" cried Sally, looking at him guilelessly. "Mr. Bertram!"

"She's very ill, Sally. Very ill indeed. I can see it. You know, you *feel* something. You see her keeping on and keeping on. Something's bound to go, sooner or later. It worries me, Sally. It worries me." From his long and unusually consecutive speech, Gaga fell into a silence. Meaninglessly, he repeated: "It worries me. That's one reason I asked you to come out to-night, Sally. I'm worried."

"Poor man!" murmured Sally.

"You know, you're kind, Sally. I can see your little bright eyes shining; and they make me . . . they make me . . ." He was once again the old, incoherent Gaga, fingering his unused cheese knife and looking at her with an expression of pathetic helplessness that made Sally wary lest she should betray amusement. "I feel you understand. You're not very old, Sally; but I feel you understand. And . . . I've always felt that. You're such a wonderful little girl. I mean . . ." He broke off with a gesture of vague despair of his power to say what he actually did mean. "I feel you can help me."

"Can I?" asked Sally, swiftly. "I'd love to."

"Would you really?" Gaga's tone was a fresh one, one of hope and light.

"Course I would," responded Sally. Already she was

aware of practical advantages. Her heightened spirits were sobered immediately. But her face did not betray this. Her face continued the demure face of a young girl, not from any artfulness, but because she was in fact a demure young girl, and her hidden mental calculations did not yet show in her habitual expression.

"You'll be friends with me?" Gaga said, as though he asked a great favour.

"If you'll let me," answered Sally, as though she conferred one.

The movement of hands was almost simultaneous, but it began with Sally. Gaga clasped her left one in his right. Only for a minute. Then Sally could not resist a giggle, and the compact was unsignalised. They talked further, Sally once again in a state of delight, and Gaga inclined to be repetitious. And then, as it was nine o'clock, Sally said she must go. He saw her to her omnibus, and they parted as friends. From her seat inside, as the bus moved off, Sally waved to him; and afterwards settled down to the journey, full of memories and reflections of a curious and enchanting character. Not of Gaga were these reflections, save with an occasionally frowning brow of doubt; but of the remarkable vista which had been opened by his demand for friendship and help. An excited recollection of the lights and the mirrors and the overwhelming noise of the restaurant intoxicated her afresh. Her whole face was shining with excitement. She smiled to herself, occupied with such a mixture of sensations and imaginings that at one moment she wondered whether she was Sally Minto at all, and whether some magician had not changed that Sally for a new creature born to spend her days in gaudy restaurants and among all the noise and luxury of such a life as she had led this evening for an hour and a half.

One moment at home was enough to convince Sally

that no magician had been at work. It was the same squalid house, and the same squalid room that she reached after the splendour of her dinner. And it was the same fretful mother who complained of her lateness and chided her for the dangers she ran in being about the streets so late. Sally made no answer. She looked in the mirror at the dilated pupils of her glowing eyes, and at her flushed cheeks and laughing lips; and her heart first sank and then violently rebelled against the contrast of this hideous place with the light and colour she had left. She was a rebel. The contrast was too great. How could she live in a room like this? How could anybody live? It was not life at all, but a mere grovelling. And Sally had tasted something that thrilled her. She had come into contact with a life resembling the life led by those who travelled in the motor broughams she so much admired. She was ravenous for such a life. Her natural arrogance was roused and inflamed by the comparison she so instinctively made between her natural surroundings and those to which she felt she was entitled by her capacities. She thought with contempt of the other girls at Madame Gala's. The wine she had drunk, the noises she had heard, mounted higher. She was primed with conceit and excitement. Hitherto she had only determined by ambition to use the world and attain comfort and success. Now she felt the *power* to attain this success. She could not experience the feeling without despising every other feeling. She looked round the room in scorn—at the dull, shabby bed, and the meagre furniture, and at the little old woman who sat by the empty fireplace with so miserable an air of confirmed poverty. She looked higher, at Miss Jubb, and saw afresh the stupid incompetence of such a creature. Even old Perce and Mrs. Perce led in her new vision a life that was good enough for them, but not good enough for

Sally. There was a better way, and Sally would not rest until she had secured that way. And she had the opportunity opening to her. Gaga had shown her as much. With the vehement exaggeration of youth that is still half-childhood, Sally saw her own genius. She felt that the world was already in her grasp. She felt like a financier before a coup. She felt like a commander who sees the enemy waver. For this night triumph seemed at hand, through some means which the heat of her brain did not allow her to analyse, but only to relish with exultation.

X

In the morning Sally had a heavy head as the result of her unusual entertainment, and she awoke to a sense of disillusion. The room was the same ugly room, but her dreams had fled. So must Cinderella have felt upon awaking after her first ball. The colours had faded; the rapturous consciousness of power had died in the night. Sally felt a little girl once more, younger and more impotent than she had been for months. The walk to Regent Street restored her. She once again imagined herself into the talk with Gaga; she stressed his offer of friendship and his plea for help. It would be all right; it *was* all right. She had made no mistake. Only, she was not as carelessly happy as she had been in the first realisation. She had recognised that the battle was not yet won, and that much had still to be done before she could claim the victory which last night had seemed in her hands. At all events, hatred of her little ugly home was undiminished. She felt horror of it.

Arrived at the work room, Sally saw it in a new light. She was permanently changed. The girls had become nothing; even Miss Summers had become a very good sort of woman, but subtly inferior. There was not one

of the girls who could help Gaga as she was going to do; not one of them who could earn the advantages which Sally was going to reap. She settled almost with impatience to work which last night had been left unfinished. All the time that she was engaged upon it her thoughts were with other prospects, other deliberate intentions. She was restless and uneasy—first of all until she had seen Gaga and gauged her effect upon him in the morning's grey, finally because another secret conflict was going on beneath her attention. She did not understand what she was feeling, and this made her the more easily exasperated when cotton knotted or a sudden noise made her head throb. "I'm out of sorts," she thought. She tried to laugh in saying: "The morning after the night before." Her malaise was something more than that.

Gaga came into the room during the morning, haggard and anxious-looking. The lines in his pallid face were emphasised; his eyes had a faintly yellowish tinge like the white of a stale egg. In shooting her first lightning observation of him Sally clicked "Bilious." There was a little smile between them, and Gaga went out of the room again, languid and indifferent to everything that was occurring round him. Sally had an impulse to find some reason for going into his room, but she did not dare to go. She sewed busily. Perhaps she would see him later. She peeped into the room at lunch-time, but he was not there, and in the afternoon she heard from Miss Summers that he was unwell, and would not be coming back that day. She heard the news with relief; but also with sudden fright. If—if—if he should have become afraid of her! If he should have repented! If, instead of allowing her to help and to benefit, Gaga should become her enemy! Men were so strange in the way they behaved to girls—so suspicious and funny and brusque—that anything might have happened in Gaga's mind.

Sally recollected herself. This mood was a bad mood: any loss of self-confidence was with her a sign of temporary ill-health. She magnificently recovered her natural conceitedness. She was Sally.

In the evening she went home early, to her mother's interest and pleasure; but there was nothing to do at home and the atmosphere was insufferable. It drove her forth, and she walked in the twilight, longing for Toby to be with her. He would not have understood all she was thinking—he would angrily have hated most of it—but his company would have distracted her mind and occupied her attention. She thought of Toby at sea on this beautiful evening, with the stars pale in an opal sky; and she could see him standing upon the deck of the "Florence Drake" in his blue jersey without a hat, with the breeze playing on his crisp hair and his brown face. A yearning for Toby filled her. Tears started to her eyes. She loved him, she felt, more than she had ever done: she needed him with her, not to understand her, but to brace her with the support of his strong arms. Sally dried her eyes and blew her nose. "Here!" she said to herself. "Stop it! I'm getting soppy!"

She presently passed the ugly building of a Board School, not the one which she had attended, but one nearer her present home. Outside it, and within the railings protecting the asphalted playground from the footpath, was a notice-board upon which was pasted a bill advertising the evening classes which would be held there during the Autumn Session. Idly, Sally stopped to read down the list of subjects—and the first that caught her eye, of course, was dressmaking. She gave a sniff. Funny lot of girls would go to that. Girls trying to do Miss Jubb out of a job. Sally glimpsed their efforts. She had seen girls in dresses which they had made themselves. Poor mites! she thought. Paper patterns for

somebody twice their size, and bad calculations of the necessary reductions. Tape-measures round their own waists and twisted two or three times at the back, which they could not see. Blunt scissors, clumsy hands, bad material. . . . It was a nightmare to Sally. She did not go far enough to imagine the despairs, the aching hands, the tears, which attended the realisation of an evening's botch. She was not really a very humane person. She had both too much imagination for that infirmity of the will, and not enough. She passed from dress-making to the other subjects.

There was one that made her jump, so much did it seem to be named there for her own especial benefit. It was "Book-keeping." Sally was taken aback. She scanned the details. Two lessons a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, at eight o'clock. A disdain filled her. She would not be as the other girls. She would learn book-keeping. She would understand figures. Then she could help Gaga with precisely that work which he confessed himself unable to do. Sally memorised the details. It was enough; she was ready for anything. As the following Monday was the first night of the session she would be present then.

And so, her ambition mounting once more to arrogance, Sally returned to bed and her mother, and bread and margarine, and the dingy room on the second-floor-back.

xi

The book-keeping class was held in one of the ordinary classrooms, separated from others by high partitions of wood which were continued to the ceiling in panes of glass. The room was filled with forms and desks, but the class was so small that all those composing it (and there were fewer still after the first six lessons) were put

into the first two or three rows of desks. The teacher was a little sandy man who made well-trodden jokes and talked in a wheezy voice well suited to his appearance. He used the blackboard, and stood upon tiptoe to scrawl upon it in a large handwriting. That was at the beginning. Later, methods developed; but for the present Sally and the others were merely initiated into the first movements of the difficult craft. With amazement she began to learn the mysteries of the signs "Dr." and "Cr.", the words "Balances", "carried forward", etc., and the meanings of such things as ruled diagonal lines. It was to her like the game of learning chess, and she had the additional pleasure of knowing that with the solution of each problem she was adding appreciably to her knowledge, and to a knowledge which henceforward would not be wasted, as she could turn it, as of all things she most desired, to immediate use. Madam's accounts would no longer be a source of trouble or bewilderment to her. She knew very soon that they would be mere child's play to her instructed intelligence.

From the teacher and the lessons, Sally turned to her fellow pupils. There were about twenty of these, the sexes almost equally represented, but with the girls in a slight majority. One or two of the young men were pale and spectacled, and so they did not interest her. The girls were generally of a higher class than her own, were obviously already employed as clerks in offices, and were rather older than herself. They were the daughters of tradesmen or clerks, and all lived at home in the better streets of the neighbourhood. They were neatly dressed, but she was easily the smartest of the audience. The other girls looked at her hair and her complexion, and then at each other; and a feud began. Sally was consoled by the evident interest of the young men, who often cast glances in her direction. She sat demurely, as if uncon-

scious, but in her wicked heart there was glee at the knowledge that this same young person Sally, once the despised companion of May Pearcey, had in a year attained such new charm as to be attractive to these young men. She shrugged her shoulders at the thought of it. Had she been an onlooker she would have been amused or cynical. As she was the cynosure of the emotional eye of the whole class she could view the natural processes of all such gatherings with satisfaction. Her shrugs were for the respectable and alienated girls, who were like sparrows chattering over a brilliant intruder; to the young men she offered an air of imperviousness to their cajoleries which made her seem to at least three of them a young person whom it might be pleasant and titillating to know. The general arrangement of feelings towards her was evident at the third lesson. By the fourth it had taken a quite definite form. She had exchanged conversation with the three men: she had smiled provokingly at the girls. The girls mentioned her at home, and to their friends; the young men did not mention her to anybody.

The men were all older than she, were in employment, and although some of them were still at home the majority of them were in lodgings in Holloway, were lonely, and were desirous of improving their positions. This was the case with Sally's three admirers. Of the three, her immediate favourite, because he most nearly resembled Toby in physical type, was a thickset dark young man with a budding black moustache and polished eyes and a strong pink upon his cheekbones. But after she had looked at him a few times she decided that he had Jewish blood, and Jews were among her aversions. So, although his name was Robertson, she passed him over in favour of a tall, rather bony fair youth of about three and twenty with smooth hair and a lean, conceited hu-

morous face. He had assurance, which she adored, and his great length made it queer to be talking to him, because she had to look high up to see his face. He always wore a light-coloured tweed suit, and a knitted tie of about ten different colours, and his aquiline nose and jaunty manner gave him an air of knowingness which she much appreciated. He was a stockkeeper in a publishing house, and came from the South of England. His voice was light in tone, and he had a delightful burr. This young man, Harry Simmons, became her friend, and soon walked part of the way home with her after each lesson. He talked politics to her, and explained all sorts of things which she had never before known. He told her how books were made, and how they were delivered unbound in great bales; and when she said "a book" meaning "a paper," he corrected her. Sally liked him. Of the three men she now knew well he was the best-informed. Accordingly she learnt more, intellectually, from him than from either of the others. He quickly fell in love with her, which was an added pleasure; and she once or twice let him kiss her, without promising anything or revealing the existence of Toby. She never kissed Harry in return, a fact which she cherished as a proof of her innocence. But she liked him very much, and told him more about herself than she had ever told anybody else. And as there is nothing like the use of such care and such flexible and uncertain kindness, when it is not calculated, for tantalising a young man who is agreeably in love with a young girl, Sally had a new delight, a new self-flattery, to cosset. The affair did not become very desperate in Harry's case—he was too conceited, and he knew the rules of the game too well—and at length it subsided normally; but it lasted pleasantly and instructively enough for perhaps four months, and the memory for both was one of smiling amusement,

untempered by chagrin. Sally's one dread in the whole course of her friendship with Harry was a dread lest Toby should see them together. That Harry should see her with Toby she did not mind, because she could at any time have relinquished Harry without a qualm; but she loved Toby, and took care to keep secret from him on their infrequent meetings anything which might disturb his ardent thoughts of the little girl he had left at home.

So book-keeping went on. And so Harry went on. But by now Sally's interests had become many, for she was leading a busy life, and the difficulty of maintaining all her affairs at the necessary pitch of freshness and importance in her attention was increasing. She had to think of her work, of Madam and her now frequent fits of illness, of Gaga, of Miss Summers, of money, of Harry, of book-keeping, of clothes, and of her mother. Mrs. Perce she rarely saw during this period, because as Sally found new preoccupations she was bound to shed some of her old ones. She thought very nicely of Mrs. Perce; but she had at the moment no time for her. Mrs. Perce belonged to a passing stage, and had not yet a niche in the new one. Toby she saw still more seldom than anybody; but for Toby Sally's feelings underwent no obvious change. They developed as her character matured, but they did not alter. She embraced him, as it were, with her mind. Toby was somehow different from all the others. He was a part of herself. She did not know why, but he stood alone, whenever she thought of him, wonderfuly strange, and strong, and enduring, as much Toby as she was Sally. She did not fear him. In some ways she despised him, for being so little pliable, so little supple in his way of managing the world. But she adored him as a man, and as a simple-minded baby who unerringly made her happy by his assurance, and delighted her by behaving as though she was something

belonging solely to himself. So long as she was confident that about nine-tenths of her life was outside the range of Toby's understanding, Sally enjoyed his delusion. It gave her such a sense of superiority that she relished her submission to his will in all trifles. She never felt that his absences made him a stranger. Rather, she felt that they increased and intensified her love and her desire for him. These at least were unabated—more ardent than ever. And the absences certainly made Toby all the more boisterously glad to see her whenever he returned from a voyage, and more demonstratively affectionate when they were alone together.

xii

Madame Gala had returned to work and Gaga had gone into the country by the time Sally had joined her book-keeping class; and so that matter seemed to be in abeyance. The ease with which the fabric of her newest plan had been made to collapse discomfited Sally, who was always impatient for quick results; but she did not abandon hope. She believed in her star. She had seen very little of Gaga since their dinner. He had avoided her, with some tokens of slight constraint, although his greetings had been almost furtively reassuring. That alone would have made her believe that he had not forgotten his promise. Sally bade despair stand back. Always, hitherto, she had found her own level: she would do it again in this instance. She had the grit of the ambitious person who succeeds. Hers was not a vague or unwarrantable conceit: she would work for its fulfilment. It is the mark of the great.

While she was waiting, she one day received a letter from Toby, announcing his imminent arrival in London. He would wait outside Madame Gala's, and they would

spend his leave together. It was now the beginning of October, and a fine Autumn had begun. The days, although rapidly growing shorter, were warm and cordial. They were better than the summer days. There was a crispness in the air, but there was no chill. Filled with pleasure, Sally wore her prettiest clothes that morning, and Toby was waiting in the sunshine at the corner of the street, and they met with light hearts. It was just one o'clock. At once they found a tea-shop, and had lunch; and then Toby sprang upon her a proposal that they should go to Richmond for the afternoon, and to Brighton the following day. He appeared to have plenty of money for both jaunts. He had planned them as soon as he knew the date of his arrival.

"O-o-o!" cried Sally. "Brighton! The sea! Will you take me out in a boat? Better not: I should be sick. Take me on the river this afternoon, instead. No: we'll just walk in Richmond Park. Ever been to Kew, Toby? The girls say it's lovely there. What's Brighton like? I went there once when I was a kid. Wasn't half fine. What d'you do there? Sit on the beach and throw stones in the water? We might paddle. Like to see me paddling? What time do we start?"

"Here, hold on," said Toby. They were walking to catch a Richmond omnibus. "You ask a lot of questions and don't wait for no answers. I say . . . look at that young woman there. . . . Look at her!"

"Well?" demanded Sally. "It's only because her shoes don't fit. She doesn't know how to wear high heels. That's all it is. That frock cost a bit."

"Did it?" Toby jerked his head. "Well, you ought to know, I suppose. It's not as smart as yours."

"D'you like it, Toby?" asked Sally, eagerly. He had never said anything before about her clothes. She was suddenly sportive with pride in his interest.

Toby nodded. He had been betrayed into his speech of approval. It was not natural to him.

"It's all right," he nonchalantly said. "I've seen worse."

Sally shook his arm, provoked by a variety of feelings. She loved him to tease her. How strange! She felt a hundred years older than Toby, and yet she felt like a little girl. And when she was with him she did not have to mind her tongue, but could be as slangy and as natural as she pleased. Toby did not know any better. She had not always to be thinking, with him, of what a real lady might be expected to say. He was a relaxation for her.

"That's right," she said. "Flatter me. Make me get swelled head. Don't think of the consequences. Ladle it out. Tell me I look a little princess."

"No, Sally. I wouldn't do that," answered Toby, possessively. "I don't want you to get above yourself. You're a bit uppish as it is. Noticed it? Well, I have. And that's a thing I want to talk to you about."

"Oh," said Sally in a dangerous tone. "What is? Look, there's a bus!"

With Sally's nimbleness and Toby's muscle they obtained seats upon the top of the bus, and, seated together, resumed their conversation in low, grumbling tones. She first repeated her question with new aggressiveness, not at all deterred from the possibility of a row by her delight in Toby's company.

"About you," said Toby. "You see, smartness is all very well; but if you're going to be a sailor's wife you got to look where you're going. Now, your last letter. It said you was being a good girl, and taking evening classes—that's because I told you my aunt see you out with a fellow one night, coming from the schools. Now what the Hell's the good of evening classes to a sailor's wife; and who *is* this fellow aunt seen you with?"

"I suppose even a sailor's wife wants to know how to cook," remarked Sally.

"Oh, cooking," grimly said Toby. "Does the fellow learn cooking, too?"

Sally was impudent. She was enjoying herself. She was rejoiced that he should be so jealous and authoritative when she knew that she could always play with him.

"I don't know which fellow your aunt saw," she answered flippantly. "There's so many of them at the classes. I can't tell which it might be. Did she tell you what he was like?"

"She told me you was arm in arm."

"That's a lie," said Sally, curtly. "Nosey old cat. She never saw me arm in arm with anybody. And even if I had been, what business is it of hers? What does she know about me? About me and you?"

"She see us last time I was home. See us twice. That's why she told me about you and this other fellow. See? She says—that girl I see you with seems to have got another young man—light come, light go."

"O-o-oh!" Sally gritted her teeth. "I *would* like to have your aunt by the back hair, Toby! Old cat! She's made it up, I expect. Interfering old beast! But, after all, there's a lot of fellows at the class, and we all come out together, and sometimes they walk a bit of the way home with me. That's all it is. Nothing to make a fuss about. I'm not a nun, got to pass men by on the other side of the road, am I?"

"Well, I won't have it!" cried Toby, restless in his seat. His dark face was darker. There was a red under his tan, and a gleam of his teeth that made him like an angry dog. "And that's enough of it. I won't have it. You belong to me. See? And if I catch another fellow nosing round I'll split his head open. Damned sauce!

Just because I'm away, you think you can go marching about. . . ."

He sulked for several minutes, frowning, and biting a torn thumbnail.

"What you done to your thumb?" demanded Sally, taking it quickly between her own fingers. Toby made no answer, but, very flushed, drew his thumb away. With her chin a little out, and an air of quietly humming to herself, Sally looked at all the shops and houses upon their route, and at the people walking sedately upon the pavements. As it was Saturday afternoon, many of the West End stores were shuttered; but as the bus went farther west, and into suburban areas, there was great marketing activity. Sally watched all the people and observed all the shops with an absorbed childish interest that was almost passionate in its intensity. She took no notice of Toby for a quarter of an hour. He might not have been there. This was his punishment for being outspoken and suspicious. She was not going to have that sort of thing from anybody. But if Sally was supercilious, Toby was stubborn. Once his grievance had been voiced, and had been taken flippantly, he was reduced to glowering. At Sally's continued disregard, and after a going over in his own mind of all they had said, Toby began to feel uncomfortable. He began to feel a fool. At the precise moment when his sensation of foolishness was strongest upon him, Sally turned and slipped her arm within his, and pressed his elbow warmly against her side. They did not speak; but peace was made. Presently Sally began to draw Toby's attention to things they passed, and although at first he was surly in his responses, Toby was gradually and surely appeased by her masterly handling of him. He was not free from suspicion—she did not want him to be, because it enhanced her value; but he was dominated by her cajolery.

When they arrived in Richmond, and had climbed the hill, and had looked down from the Terrace Gardens upon that lovely piece of the Thames which is to be seen from the height, Sally and Toby walked arm in arm about the Deer Park. They saw the leaves falling, quite yellow, although the trees were still dense with foliage; and the crisp air exhilarated them. In the sun it was hot and dazzlingly bright.

"Tell me about what you've seen, Toby," suddenly asked Sally.

"Seen?" Toby fumbled a minute in his mind. "What d'you mean—seen?"

"At sea, and when you go ashore. *You* know. Ships and places."

Toby looked puzzled. "Well, what's there to tell?" he questioned. "A ship's a ship. You wouldn't understand if I was to tell you I'd seen a schooner, or a barque, or a cattle-boat, or a dinghy." He was rather lofty. "I mean, you wouldn't *know*."

"How do *you* know, then? How can *you* tell the difference?" she persisted.

Toby laughed at the fact that she had not recognised how he had slipped in the dinghy among recognisable ships. He had supposed everybody knew what a dinghy was. He pointed that fact out to Sally, who could not see that she had betrayed such glaring foolishness. Pressed to confine himself to comparable vessels, Toby condescendingly resumed:

"It's a question of the size, and the rig . . . All that." He was elaborately the expert, sure that an amateur could never understand. Sally might have retorted with baffling words about seams and camisoles and voile; but she was shrewd in mystic silence. "You'd have to see the ships . . . Then I could point it all out to you. I mean, a gunboat or a cruiser or a trawler . . . What I mean,

they're *different.* See a big liner going out from Liverpool: I tell you, it's a sight. Flocks of people, and the old thing moving along like grease. Leaves you standing. At first you don't half feel a fool. But on a boat like ours there's no time to look about. We're under-manned. That's what it is. Not enough of us to make it light for everybody. Ought to be altered. Got to be doing chores the whole time. Swabbing down, cooking——"

"Can *you* cook?" Sally was swift, arch, incredulous.

Toby grinned. Then he remembered her classes—her "cooking" classes—and his aunt's message, and grew suddenly serious.

"Look here, Sally. That cooking. I don't like them other fellows," he said. "I mean to say, meeting them at classes, and walking home, and that."

Sally held his arm tightly. A look of scorn appeared upon her face. In her heart a feeling arose of impatience and amused enjoyment of his concern about a thing that was to her so trivial compared with her love for himself.

"You going to begin that again?" she demanded. "Silly. Here, put your face down. There! D'you think I don't love you. Think I don't believe you're worth ten of those others? Well, I do. And that's enough of that."

Toby was obstinate. He wanted her to be his property. Nevertheless, his tone was milder.

"It's not right, Sally, you going about with other fellows. What I mean, *you* think it's all right, but what do *they* think?"

"I don't care *what* they think. I don't care what anybody thinks, except you. And if you don't trust me, well . . ."

Toby was manifestly terrified at the removal of her arm from his. He caught it again, but she wrenched free. For a few moments they walked along together in dead silence, gloomy and disunited. Toby clenched his

fists. He looked about him, and uneasily rocked his head and cleared his throat. Sally knew that he was reassuring himself by saying internally that if that was the tone she was going to take . . .

"You see . . ." he began.

"Oh, shut up!" cried Sally, savagely. "I've had enough of it." A moment later he heard a little sob from her, and moved close, overcome with his consternation. At his touch she started away. Here it was that Toby's physical strength served. He was easily able to put his arms round her, and hold her closely. A voice from the faintly struggling Sally wailed: "You don't trust me . . . You'd better get some other girl . . ."

"I do! I do!" Toby swore. "Damn it all, Sally. I mean to say . . ."

"Bring me out . . . make me miserable . . ." came the strangled little voice.

Toby was conquered. Sally knew that she had him at her mercy. She had known it all along. She had been enjoying herself, enjoying this second quarrel as much as the first one, because she knew exactly what the outcome would be. A quarrel is always worth while to a loving girl, for the sake of the reconciliation. They were the sweetest moments of the day, because in them was begun the true softening of hearts and rousing of the emotions which later gave them so much delight. Toby and Sally were happy all the rest of the afternoon and evening, and loved one another; and when it was dark, and none could observe them, Toby kissed Sally with all the fervour that he had saved up in his long days away from her. He kissed her lips and her cheeks and her eyes, and crushed the life out of her with his powerful arms. And Sally, at first laughing, had grown quieter and quieter in his arms as her joy in his love had deepened. They stood there, far above the river, in the gloaming,

with the leaves whispering and slowly floating down through the air as they fell from above. Presently the moon rose, and in the moonlight the two wandered together, and forgot all their plans and ambitions and jealousies. Both were given over entirely to the moment, and to the passion of the moment, which was still as strong as it had ever been.

xiii

A fortnight passed. Gaga came and went. Sally had no word with him, because he could not speak to her in the workroom or in his mother's room, and because she never met him (as she half expected to do) in the street. Sally often thought of their evening together, but gradually, as Gaga took no further step, she became sceptical about his plan, and she hardened towards him. Already her active mind was casting about for new outlets. She visited Mrs. Perce, and repaid ten shillings of the amount she owed her. She wrote to Toby, walked with Harry Simmons, had conversations with Miss Summers and Muriel and Mrs. Minto. And so the days passed. But at length Gaga took the awaited step. He met her one evening, as if by accident, upon the stairs, and immediately stopped. She had gone past him when Gaga found his tongue, and checked Sally's progress by a stammering. She waited.

"Er . . . I never . . . see you now," he began. Sally looked up at his tall figure, thrown sharply into relief by the clear light from a window upon the stairs, and by the pale grey distemper of the wall behind him. Again she noticed that creeping redness under the grey of his cheeks, and the almost liquid appeal which he directed at her. "I . . . er . . . I meant to ask you . . . Tomorrow . . ."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Bertram! I'd love to," cried Sally, quickly. He was passionately relieved, as she could see. Not only by her acceptance of his intended suggestion, but at the salvation of his tongue.

"At the corner? Seven o'clock? At the corner? Where . . . where . . . where we met before? Really? Fine!" He nodded, and took off his hat, and climbed the stair. Sally, very sedate, descended. Well, she was still all right, then. How strange, she was quite cool! She was not at all elated! That was because of the delay, which had encouraged indifference; but it was also because the invitation was expected and because Sally was no longer to be shaken as she would have been by a novelty. She was ready. She was once again a general surveying the certainties of combat with a foe inferior in resources to herself.

So the next evening she deliberately stayed later than the other girls, and worked on with a garment which had occupied her attention all the afternoon. She was doing some plain embroidery upon a silk frock. It was upon this occasion that she received a great mark of favour from Miss Summers. Miss Summers, trusting Sally entirely, showed her how to lock the door after her. She had just to slip the catch, and slam the door, and nobody could enter the room without first using a key. And Miss Summers went, leaving Sally alone in the workroom. It was a thing hitherto unknown. It showed trust which had never been given to one of the other girls. Apart from Madam and Gaga, if one or both of them should still be working in Madam's room, Sally was at liberty, and in sole occupation of the establishment. It did not occur to Sally to think so; but Miss Summers would never have given her this privilege if she had not known that Madam also would approve. It would have been too dangerous a responsibility for Miss Summers un-

supported. Madam must have seen that petty theft was a thing which did not tempt Sally. She was too ambitious for that, and obviously so. Keen judge of character as Madam was she must have known it all. But neither Madam nor Miss Summers could have realised—as both, with their experience of girls, should have done—that there were possibilities other than theft. Sally had listened to the explanation of the door catch, and had promised to shake the door when she left, so as to make sure that it was fast; but her only conscious thought had been one of surprise and delight that she should be left alone. Alone to do as she pleased. Alone to sing, dance, loiter. Alone, perhaps, with Gaga. At that notion she had a curious little thrill of excitement. Her eyes became fixed for a moment. She did not speak, or give any other sign. She was not thinking. Merely, her general awareness was pierced by a sudden ray.

Had she been sure that Gaga was by himself in the next room, Sally would have found some excuse to go in there. It would have been such an opportunity as she had never had before. But although she went close to the door, and listened eagerly, there was no sound within. The room might have been empty. Or Madam might be there; and if Sally sang, which would please Gaga, Madam might come out, find her in the workroom without real excuse, and give her the sack. Sally was too wise to believe that in such a case Gaga could save her. She could imagine him stammering a defence, and being crushed, and perhaps being kind to her for a little while and fussing about to find her a job elsewhere. And that would be the end of that. She neither sang nor whistled. Every now and then she again listened, until she was impatient with uncertainty. Her impatience made her laugh. Fancy being impatient for seven o'clock!

And for Gaga! It wasn't natural. It was—like Gaga himself—ridiculous.

Seven o'clock struck before she was ready; but Sally did not care. She had no objection to the thought of Gaga waiting in patience at the corner of the street. Toby would have been a slightly different matter. Not that she was more afraid of Toby now than she was of Gaga. All the same, she would not have kept him waiting. Neither Toby nor Gaga would have kept Sally waiting. Toby would have been punctual; Gaga had been standing at the corner already for five minutes. It was a curious moral effect that Sally had. She was not to be treated lightly. Even now, she was learning her power, and in this case she was illustrating it. She did not join Gaga until she was satisfied that every smallest fold in her dress was in perfect order, her hat precisely at the desired angle, her gloves buttoned. Then, shutting the door with a steady bang which rendered any shaking needless, she kept her appointment, not a timid dressmaker's assistant, but a woman of the world. At seventeen—for she had not yet reached her eighteenth birthday, although it was now very near—she was more of a woman of the world than she would be at twenty-eight, when her first intuitions had been blunted by actual experience.

Gaga was standing thoughtfully leaning upon his walking stick. His shoulders were bent, and the slim, and rather graceful, outline of his figure made him appear almost pathetic in his loneliness. Sally—Sally the hard and ambitious—was struck by a sharp irritation and pity, almost by compunction. She did not know what her feeling for Gaga was; but principally it was composed of contempt. He had good looks, and he had money. He could help her at present as nobody else could do. But at heart Sally dismissed him with a

word which, to her, was fatal. He was soppy. Not mad, not altogether stupid, but painfully lacking in vital energy and confidence. Of all things Sally best loved assurance, and Gaga had none of it. He drooped in waiting, and the message of his fine clothes was contradicted by his pose, and not reinforced by it.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said perfunctorily, at his start of recognition and delight. Gaga's face changed completely. From one of gloom, his expression became one of joy. "I didn't notice the time. I was working there alone—Miss Summers had gone. I was finishing something. I didn't know if you'd gone or not. I couldn't hear anything from Madam's room. Didn't like to knock, or anything."

Gaga said nothing. He walked by her side, and Sally looked up at him almost as she might have done at a policeman or a lamp-post. He *was* tall, she thought, when he straightened his back. And he dressed like a prince. At that instant she was proud to be walking by his side. She thought: "I must look a shrimp beside him! Him so big—so tall, and me so little. But I'm as smart as he is, any day in the week. Wish he always held himself up like that! What salmony lips he's got, and . . . it's his long lashes that make his eyes look so soft. Chocolate eyes . . . Funny! He's got a weak chin. No, his *chin's* all right. It's . . . you can't see his jaw at all: goes right in, and gets lost. And a funny nose—got no shape to it. Just a nose." She had the curiosity to wonder what his grey cheek felt like. She would like, one day, to touch it with her finger, just to see. It looked dry and soft. All this she glimpsed and considered like lightning while they walked quickly towards Piccadilly Circus; and her notions gathered and grew in Gaga's silence.

"Were you working?" Sally presently asked, trying to say something to begin a conversation.

Gaga shook his head, stealing a shy glance down at her.

"No. Not working," he said. "I had rather a headache, so I went for a walk in the Park."

"Oo. Sorry you've got a headache." Sally unconsciously became sympathetic. "Is it very bad? It's nerves, I expect. If you're nervous you have splitting headaches. My mother's *always* talking about her head. She gets so tired, you know; and it goes to her head; and she sits still and can't think about anything else. Is . . . is Madam quite well now? She was looking so ill . . ."

Gaga became mournful. The mention of his mother always, it seemed to Sally, made him miserable. Silly Gaga! He then did something which had an imperceptible effect upon Sally's thought of him. It was a mistake, because it illustrated his lack of initiative and his powerlessness to strike out a fresh path. He made straight for the Rezzonico again. He ought to have taken Sally to another restaurant; but he instinctively took her to the place where they had dined happily before. In that he betrayed to her merciless judgment the fact of his inexperience. Silently, they entered the big dining-room. The band was not playing at the moment, and, as they were early, the room was less full than it had been upon the first occasion. The enormous mirrors reflected their hesitating movements. Gaga made his way vaguely towards their former table; but Sally laid a hand upon his arm. It was time for her to take command. Into her expression there crept the faintest hardness, almost a tough assurance, that was tinged with the contempt which was her deepest feeling for Gaga.

"Couldn't we get a table against the wall . . . down there?" she demanded, pointing.

It was done. They were installed, and a young and rapid waiter was attending to them. This time Sally helped to choose the dinner. She could not read the menu, because she knew no French; but the waiter, with an uncanny insight, realised that he would do well to address her and to explain the dishes to Sally instead of to Gaga; and so, to the relief of all three, they were quickly served, and wine was brought, and Sally began to feel creeping upon her all the old pleasure and excitement of noise and wine and an intriguing situation. Her hardness vanished. She sat almost with complacency, breaking her roll with two small hands, and looking at Gaga with that thin little grin which caused her meagre face to be so impish and attractive. The brilliant lights which made Sally more and more piquante had a ghastly effect upon Gaga. His grey cheeks were cruelly betrayed.

"I'm afraid mother's . . . mother's not what she ought . . . I'm afraid mother's ill," began Gaga, stammering. Then, impulsively: "I say . . . I'm so glad you came tonight. I . . . I've been—you know, my head—I've been miserable, and . . . I've been bad-tempered all day. But I'm better now. Couldn't help . . . feeling better, seeing you there . . ."

Sally grinned again. If her cheeks had been plumper he could have seen two dimples; but all that was observable was the row of tiny pointed teeth that made her smile so mischievous. Sally's eyes looked green in the electric light—green and dark and dangerous, like deep sea; and her pallor was enhanced, so that she was almost beautiful. There was something both naïve and cat-like in her manner, and the tilt of her head. She surveyed Gaga with eyes that were instinctively half-closed. She could delightedly perceive the effect she was having upon him. He sometimes could not look at her at all, but fixed his at-

tention upon his plate while she was speaking, or no higher than her neck when he was himself—as he rarely did—making an attempt to entertain. And all Gaga's hesitations and shynesses made Sally amused and sure of herself, and she began to take pleasure in dominating him. When she found that Gaga not only did not resent this, but was pleased and thrilled by her domination, Sally grew triumphant. She chose the sweet for them both, sweeping her eye down the prices and listening to the waiter's translation of each title. She sipped her wine with a royal air of connoisseurship. And she kept such control of the situation that Gaga was afraid to give words to the timid ardour which shone from his expressive glance. Sally was herself: it was still she who conferred every favour, and not Gaga.

Presently she had a thought that whipped across her mind like a sting.

"D'you know what I've been doing since we came here before?" she demanded. "I've been taking lessons in book-keeping. I'm getting on fine. The teacher says I've got a proper head for figures. He says I shall be a cashier in no time, and understand all that you can know about accounts. Isn't that good? So I shall be able to help you—like you said . . ."

Gaga gave an admiring gesture. He was overwhelmed.

"Oh, but you're . . . marvellous!" he cried. "Simply marvellous! Here's Miss Summers says you're the best hand, for your age, that she's got . . ."

"Did she say that?" Sally jumped for joy. "Really?" She gave a triumphant laugh, so naïve and full of ingenuous conceitedness that Gaga was overcome afresh with admiration.

"You ought to have been two people," he answered. "Two little girls."

"Half a dozen!" Sally proclaimed. "You see, I'm—it

sounds conceited, and I expect I am; but it's true—I'm clever. I'm not soppy. Other girls—Rose Anstey . . . They're soppy. They can't do anything. I can do all sorts of things because I'm clever—I can sew, and . . . you know, all sorts of things."

Gaga glowed at her words.

"I know," he eagerly agreed. "That's why you're so wonderful. Most girls can only do one thing. They can't even do that very well."

"That's true. Takes them a week to do it; and then somebody has to do it over again for them. They haven't got any brains. They got no *sense*. They don't *think*." Sally was impetuous.

"They've got no brains at all," said Gaga. "They're like vegetables." Both laughed, in great spirits and familiarity. "Well, Sally . . . My mother's . . . She's a wonderful woman, too. She's been marvellous. Marvellous! She must have been like you . . ."

Sally shrugged.

"Bigger than me," she murmured, brooding upon an unwelcome comparison.

"No. Not bigger. She's nearly three times as old as you. My father died, you see . . . I was a child. She had to make a living. *Had* to."

"So have I got to," whispered Sally. "I got no father; and mother's in her second childhood."

Gaga stopped. He looked at her. A singular expression crossed his face.

"Now, you have to," he said. "Er, I mean . . . Well, . . . you won't always."

"Mean, I'll marry?" demanded Sally, sharply. "Give it all up to cook the dinner and wash the front step?" She shrugged again.

Gaga reddened slightly.

"I . . . I didn't think you'd do that," he said, hesi-

tatingly. "I only meant . . . What I wanted to say . . . mother's not well. She's ill. She's really ill. She'll have to take a holiday. I wonder . . ." His hesitation was more prolonged than usual. He became as it were lost in a kind of doubtful reverie. Sally could not tell whether he was thinking or whether the wheels of his mind had altogether ceased to revolve. His mouth gaped a little. At last he concluded: "I wonder if I could . . . if I could borrow you from Miss Summers. If she'd mind. If she'd let you go."

There was a silence, while both thought of this possibility.

"Look here," cried Sally, confidently. "Like this evening, Miss Summers left me there—all alone. I mean to say, she didn't *mind*. She wouldn't leave any of the other girls like that; but she left me. She knew it was all right. Well, I wouldn't mind stopping in the evemings and helping you. I'd like to. I'm quick. I could get through a lot of work."

"Oh, but it wouldn't be fair," he objected.

"Why not? I'd love it. See, I'd get overtime."

Sally was really prompting Gaga in this last sentence. He frowned, and moved one of his long hands impatiently across some crumbs which lay before him on the table.

"Oh, money . . ." he said. "More than overtime. We'd . . . I say, it's splendid of you. It's a splendid way to do it."

"Would you like it?" breathed Sally, her heart beating faster at the implication. Gaga reddened. His lips were pressed together.

"It would be perfect!" he cried, vigorously.

"How lovely!" Sally's face broke once more into that expressive grin. They sat smiling at each other, almost as lovers do who have stumbled upon an unsuspected

agreement in taste. The mood lasted perhaps a minute. Then it changed ever so slightly. "Would Madam mind?" next urged Sally.

Gaga's face clouded. She was watching him breathlessly, and saw his fists clenched. His tongue moistened the lips so lately compressed. His head was inclined. At last, dubiously, he spoke.

"I wonder," he muttered. "I haven't said anything to her. I don't think . . ." His face fell still more, until it was undetermined. "I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid . . . perhaps she mightn't like it. You see, she's . . . she's . . . rather . . . She doesn't like anybody . . . She mightn't quite . . . understand."

Sally's contentment vanished abruptly. Her heart became fierce, and her tone followed. It was rough and hard, with a suggestion of despair and of something less than respect for Gaga.

"It's no good!" she cried. "It's no good. I'm a girl. Girls can never do anything! A man can do all sorts of things; but, just because she *is* a girl, a girl can't do one of them!"

She was watching him all the time she was speaking, and only half realised that her indignation was warmly simulated in order to produce an effect upon him and stiffen a wavering determination. For a moment Gaga did not speak. He was turning the matter over in his mind, and Sally saw the changes of opinion that passed across his face. Weakness, submission, obstinacy, bewilderment were all to be observed. Above all, weakness; but a weakness that could be diverted into defiance through dread of her own contempt. The moment was desperate. Tears sprang to Sally's eyes. She became tense with chagrin and stubbornness. A gesture would have swept her wineglass to the floor.

"Never mind!" she cried, savagely, now really moved

to anger and despair. "You see how it is! I always knew it wouldn't be any good. Knew it! Oh, I ought to have . . ."

Gaga was roused. His voice, when he spoke, was strangled.

"Don't be silly!" he cried. "We'll do it . . . er . . . we'll . . . somehow we'll do it." Sally waited, her anger cooling, a hope rising once again in her breast. Cruel knowledge of him surged into her thoughts. At last the determination she desired came from Gaga. He said, in a grim tone: "She needn't know. We won't tell her."

Sally's eyes closed for a moment. As if she had willed this, she had attained her end. No longer was there to be any doubt. They had an understanding. They were going to do something together which must be kept secret between themselves. She did not make even a tactical display of unwillingness. She too greatly desired the end to endanger (though it should be to confirm) her aim by any further display of finesse. It was enough. She was hot in her glimpse of the triumph she had secured. She would be able to stay. The rest of their evening was now unimportant, because they had need only to speak of details, and of matters unconnected with the plan.

xiv

Upon the day following this dinner and momentous conversation, Sally was working listlessly amid the hum of girls' chatter, which proceeded unchecked while Miss Summers was out of the room, when she had a singular knowledge of something in store. She was struck almost by fear. Quickly she looked up, and across at Rose Anstey, and beyond Rose to the door of Madam's room. Miss Summers stood in the doorway, smiling, and

beckoning to Sally. Smiling—so it could not be anything . . . Madam wanted Sally; but Madam would not tell Miss Summers . . . Had she found out about Gaga? Sally's heart was like lead. But Miss Summers was smiling kindly and significantly, which she would not have done if she had thought the interview promised to be unpleasant. Besides, Gaga had said Miss Summers called Sally her best worker. It was nevertheless a nervous girl who went into the room, heard the door close behind her, and found herself alone with Madam.

The room was that tawny one in which Sally had first seen Madame Gala. It was lighted by one large window, and it was not really a large room, although it contained Madam's enormous table and a bureau and a number of shelves upon which reference books stood. It was very quiet and cool in summer, and warm in winter; and Madam sat at her writing desk in a stylish costume unconcealed by any overall. Seated, she did not look so terrifyingly tall; but her faded eyes had still that piercing scrutiny which had disturbed Sally at the first encounter. Her face was lined; her hair bleached and brittle; but the long thin nose, and hard thin mouth, and parched thin cheeks all gave to her glance a chilling quality hard to endure. Her hands were those of a skeleton: all the bones could be seen white under the cream skin. Sally, abashed and full of flutterings of secret guilt, stood before her as she might have stood before one omniscient; but her brain was not abashed, and her hearing was as strained as her alert wits. So the two hard personalities encountered. Presently Madam smiled—a smile that was tortured, like Gaga's, and showed anæmic gums but a row of astonishingly good teeth.

"Sally," she said. "Sit down there, will you. Now, you've been here nearly a year. D'you know that? You were seventeen when you came. You're eighteen now."

"Nearly," interjected Sally.

"Well, when you came you had seven shillings a week. We're going to make it ten shillings from now. And of course overtime as usual. You understand that I don't want you to talk outside about your wages. At the end of what we call the financial year we may be able to give you more. I can't promise that. But Miss Summers tells me that you are a good and willing worker; and I can tell for myself that you are intelligent. I think it will be worth while for you to stay here; and if you go on as you have begun I shall hope to keep you. Now don't get the idea that you're indispensable. Don't get conceited. But be encouraged by knowing that I take an interest in you. That will do, Sally, thank you. . . ."

"Thank you, Madam," responded Sally, demurely. She stood in an attitude of humility, a tremulous smile of candid satisfaction playing round her mouth.

Nobody in the workroom could have guessed from her manner the turbulence of Sally's emotions. Pleasure, relief, self-confidence struggled within her. She felt an enormous creature surveying a pigmy world; and yet, mechanically, she resumed her sewing at the point where she had left it. The other girls all turned inquisitive faces in her direction. Was it the sack? A row? A rise? Nothing at all? Sally was a baffling creature . . . a white-faced cocket. She was deep. That word of Miss Rapson's had entered the hearts of the girls. Sally had heard it; she knew that they felt her superiority, and gaped at it with faint resentment. A flash told her now that they were all on tiptoe, and her nonchalance was a piece of acting which she enjoyed for its effect upon the others. She most mischievously enjoyed her privilege. And she had a new cause for triumph, a double success. She felt herself a schemer, an intriguer, which she was not. She was merely an opportunist, seizing the main

chance. Not only had she a secret understanding with Gaga; she had also a secret understanding with Gaga's mother. She was most marvellously Sally Minto. The world was open to her. It was not the extra three shillings a week that intoxicated her: it was the sense of a difficult and engaging future. Her ambition had never been so strong. She turned her thoughts to the miserable room at home, to her mother, to Mrs. Perce. She wandered afield to the dinners with Gaga, to her recent talk with Madam. Not merely wealth, but power, seemed to lie ahead. She saw once more Madam's bad health; the probable exaltation of Miss Summers. If she took care, she would presently lie in the very heart of the business. Its accounts would be under her hand in the evenings; its work visible to her eye in the daytime. Miss Summers liked her and trusted her; she was sure of her own ability, her own shrewdness; without deliberately planning it, she had earned the good-will of the three people who really mattered, so far as her progress was concerned.

What if Madam were away ill? What if she died? Sally trembled at the prospect. She trembled lest some accident should interfere with what was otherwise inevitable. She knew that with Miss Summers she had no rival; her compact with Gaga was secure, unless his weakness betrayed them. Even here, she knew she might rely upon his integrity. Gaga would keep to his word. Sally saw herself installed as bookkeeper—oh, if she were only older! If she were older, if she were twenty-five, she would hold the business in the hollow of her hand. She was already learning how to speak to the ladies who came to give orders; her shrewdness would quickly show her which were good accounts and which required watching; and her work never grew careless. With each perception Sally's brain and her capacity for adapting her-

self to every circumstance seemed to expand. She was already much older than her years. With a little more experience she would be in a commanding position. But Madam must be ill, Madam must . . . Madam must be very ill; and yet not before Sally had made sure of Gaga. Gaga was the key with which she would enter into her proper sphere. He must be her mascot.

With her head bent Sally stitched busily on, never allowing ambition to distract her from the immediate task. Baffled, the girls fell again to their work. That Sally Minto was deep—you couldn't tell what she was doing, what she was thinking. She was deep. Under her breath Sally was humming a tune, a familiar tune. A slow grin spread over her white face, and faded again. Looking up, she caught Miss Summers's eye, and smiled faintly, gratefully, reassuringly. She recognised at once how pleased and proud Miss Summers was at Sally's progress. If her mind had not been so busy, Sally would have felt a little warmth stealing into her heart; but she was not aware of anything except Sally Minto and her plans for worldly advancement. She for this moment saw Miss Summers also merely as an instrument, a plump, pussy-faced woman with an eternally cold nose and a heart quick to respond to the best efforts of her favourite hand.

XV

It was with a jump of excitement that Sally heard, in the following week, that Madam was very ill indeed. Gaga came in the morning with a haggard face, having spent the night by his mother's bedside. He had a few words with Miss Summers, who came out of the room with a comically solemn look upon her plump face. She made no remark to the girls, but at lunch time, when the others were out, or were dispersed in the part of the

building where they were allowed to eat whatever they had brought for lunch, Sally stole into Madam's room, and found Gaga there, sitting at the desk with his hands covering his face. When Sally approached him he did not seem to have heard her, but continued sitting thus, lost in a depressed stupor. Sally knew that there was nobody in the room behind her: they were quite alone.

"Mr. Bertram!" she said, quietly. Still he made no response. Her heart quickened. Was he asleep? Was he—was he dead? She took a further step, and then spoke his name again. There was a slight movement. He was awake, and merely very unhappy and perhaps exhausted. With the slightest feeling of self-consciousness she advanced to Gaga's side, and laid a hand upon his shoulder. She could see the thinning hair upon the top of his head, and the long slim fingers pressed to his temples.

"Mr. Bertram, I'm so sorry," whispered Sally. Her arm slipped farther round his shoulders, and her breast was against his head, so gently pressing there that Gaga was only conscious of the faintest contact. He relaxed slightly, and his hands fell. Two gloomy eyes looked up into Sally's face. She withdrew her arm, standing now beside him, altogether apart.

"You made me feel queer," Sally went on. "Thought you were in a faint or something. Are you ill? Oh, say something, say *something!*"

All Sally's little thin body grew rigid as she spoke, for Gaga looked at her with an air of distraction. He seemed not to recognise her. His eyes were yellow and suffused, his mouth was open, his appearance that of one who was hardly sane.

"I'm all right," came at last with an effort from his dry lips. "All right, Sally. Only tired . . . ever so tired." There followed a stiff attempt to smile, and then

his face was hidden once again by the long hands. "My head's throbbing. It's like pincers in my head."

"Have you got any medicine?" she asked, quite moved by his weakness. "Go out and get some. Quick! Get a chemist to . . ." The head was slowly shaken. "You *ought* to. You can't do anything if you're ill. Can't do any work, or help Madam, or anything."

"Better presently," groaned Gaga. "That's . . . that's all right, Sally. Good little girl to be so kind. I've been up all night. She's very bad, Sally; very bad. I've been up all night. Never mind; I'll be better presently." He relapsed into his former comatose state, nerveless and lethargic.

"You ought to get some sleep now. Go home to bed," urged Sally. "It's no good trying to work if you're sick. Go home now." She did not know how motherly, how caressing and wise, her voice had become. She was absorbed in his state of exhaustion and passivity. "It's not right," she went on. "You can't do any good. Get the doctor to give you something to make you sleep."

Gaga groaned again, still lost in his own sensations.

"No good," he murmured. "I can't sleep. That's what's the matter. Nothing does any good. I can't sleep—can't forget. Only sit here like this, and feel stupid. Never mind, Sally. Good little girl." He spoke thickly, like a man who has been drinking; but he was stupidly unshakable. She could do nothing with him. Having withdrawn her arm she could not again lay it upon his shoulders; but stood silent, feeling helpless and on tiptoe, with a sense of strain. She was not miserable nor anxious about him; she could almost hear her own voice, so nearly had detachment come upon her. And with something like cramp in her limbs, and paralysis of her ingenuity, she remained by his side, one hand resting for support upon Gaga's desk. Presently he with-

drew one of his own hands, and patted hers; and as if that released her Sally went very quietly back to the workroom. There she saw two or three of the girls busy reading a paper, and in a little while Miss Summers came back and work was resumed. By the time Sally could again go into Madam's room Gaga had disappeared, and they did not see him all the following day.

xvi

Two days later he returned, and dully went on with his work as though it had no interest for him. Miss Summers had several times to suffer the ordeal of debilitating interviews; and towards the end of the afternoon was exasperated to tears. Sally could tell this from the sniffs and nose-rubbings that became more and more frequent. Miss Summers's eye-rims were quite pink, and her funny eyes were moist. She looked more than ever like a disconsolate tabby, and her hands were restless and clumsy. She had to ask Sally to thread her needle, and even to finish work that she was doing badly because of her agitation.

"Thank you, my dear," murmured Miss Summers. "So kind." Then, in a low tone, "Do for goodness' sake go in and see what Mr. Bertram's doing. He's quite absurd, like somebody mad. He's not in his senses, that's clear; and it's enough to drive anybody crazy."

Sally left the girls and slipped into Madam's tawny room. At her entrance Gaga gave a start, and his ruler fell clattering to the floor. But when he saw who was there his face brightened. A faint smile spread across the grey cheeks, making Gaga look so charming, in spite of his illness, that Sally was unexpectedly relieved. Her own smile was instantly responsive, and she stood almost

roguishly before him in her short frock, and the demure pinafore which she was wearing over it.

"Miss Summers sent me," she explained. "Thought you might want some help."

Gaga shook his head, the smile still apparent. He shook his head again, trying to find words to express himself, and failing.

"No, Sally," he at last ventured. "No help. I'm better . . . almost better, today. I can understand . . . understand what I'm doing. I'm afraid . . . er . . . afraid I was very stupid the other day. I've thought of that since. Er . . . I say . . . I wish you'd . . . come out to dinner tonight."

"Really?" Sally beamed upon him. She gave her little grin, and nodded. "If you'd like me to, of course I will. I'll be ready. Thank you very much."

Gaga made a heroic effort. He began to stammer, checked himself, and at last succeeded in imposing coherence upon his wandering words.

"It's you who . . . ought to be thanked," he answered. "You cheer me up."

"Do I?" Sally's tone was eager, her reply instant. "I'm so glad. I like to feel I . . . you know, cheer you. Does *me* good."

They exchanged shy smiles, and parted; Gaga to resume his labours, Sally to report his increasing sanity to Miss Summers. And then there followed the unwanted hours that always lie between the making of a desired appointment and the enjoyment of its arrival. Sally stitched with a will, for her anticipations for this evening were not of an ambitious kind. She knew all the time she was working that she looked forward to the outing, and she was not at all puzzled at her own expectancy, because in any case a dinner with Gaga would always make a break in her often monotonous days and evenings. But

she could never altogether fail to make impulsive plans, and it was as the result of unconscious reflection that she checked Gaga in the course of their walk together.

"Don't let's go to the Rezzonico," she said, quickly. "Let's go somewhere quiet.'

As a result, they turned eastward, into the region of the smaller restaurants, and looked at several before Sally picked one called "Le Chat Blanc." It seemed to her to be the quietest and cleanest they had seen, and at any rate it would be a new experience to dine there. The doorway was modest, and the windows curtained low enough (in a red and white check) to permit a glimpse of the small but shining interior. Within, all was grey and white. Sally led the way into the place, and to a remote table, and seated herself with an air of confidence remarkable in one who dined, as it were, for the third time only. She glanced at the two waitresses—both very dark girls with earrings, who wore their black hair coiffed high upon their heads. They were Italians, agreeable and inquisitive; and the food-smells also were Italian and full flavoured. As soon as the two were seated they became the property of one of the two waitresses, who stood over them so maternally that she seemed to have no desire but for their good-fortune in choosing the meal aright. She plunged both Sally and Gaga into a muddle by her persuasive translations of the menu, but she made up for her linguistic deficiencies by this anxious interest and by a capricious smile. Scared and curious, they looked round the plain grey walls of the clean little room, and at the four or five other people who sat near them, and at the ceiling, and at each other.

"It's funny!" whispered Sally, exultingly. "Never seen anything like it."

"I . . . I've never seen one . . . so . . . so clean," stammered Gaga.

Near them a conceited young man with a hard voice and small eyes was talking impressively to an untidy-looking girl in green with a mauve chiffon scarf. While he talked, the girl smoked his cigarettes, and interjected remarks of superior quality. Sally heard her say "Ah," in sign of agreement, and once "Oh, yes, of course Flaubert . . ."

"What's Flaubert?" she asked Gaga. He appeared startled.

"Er . . . I don't know," he answered. "What put it into your head?"

"That girl said it. Listen." They listened. The young man was arguing about something. He was arguing about something of which neither Sally nor Gaga could discover the purport. Sally said: "They're both woolly. Woolly-wits, they are. Both got maggots. What's 'art,' anyway? Pitchers? And all that about values?"

Gaga was buried. He had a sudden inspiration.

"Don't listen to them," he said. "It's something they . . . they understand."

"I bet they don't," remarked Sally. "You don't talk about things you understand."

"Well, let's talk about what *we* don't understand . . ." He was beseeching in his tone, and his soft eyes glowed. The waitress approached, bearing two large plates piled high with spaghetti."

"Golly!" ejaculated Sally. "Howjer eat it? Fingers?"

They had little time to talk while they were engaged with the capers of this surprising food; but when both were tired of playing with the spaghetti they turned their attention to the straw-covered bottle of Chianti which had been brought. Sally made a wry mouth at her first venture. She had yet to learn that the wine was heavier than any she had yet drunk. She strained her ears to

catch more of what the fascinatingly conceited young man was saying about his inexhaustible topic. Good-looking boy, if he cut his hair and shaved his moustache off. She saw Gaga look anxiously and wonderingly across at her, with a kind of hunger; and she was shaken by a mischievous notion. She had never done such a thing before, but she put her foot forward so that it touched one of his, and smiled right into Gaga's chocolate eyes. The slow red crept up under his skin, and they had no need to talk. Sally was laughing to herself, and eating some beautifully cooked veal, and she knew that Gaga was glowing with contentment. She at last observed the two talkers slouch out of the restaurant, the man in very baggy-kneed trousers and a loose coat, and the girl in a dress of home make. A quick wrinkle showed in Sally's grimacing nose as she brought her professional eye to bear; and then the two talkers were gone and were forgotten. Sally and Gaga were quite alone at their end of the room, in a corner, favorably remote for intimate conversation from the remaining diners.

"Funny us not knowing what they were talking about," mused Sally. "You don't, you know. It's very hard to know what anybody talks about. To understand it, I mean. Hard to know anybody, too."

"I shouldn't have thought I was hard to know," ventured Gaga.

"I wasn't thinking about you," said Sally, with unconscious cruelty. "I was thinking . . . I've forgotten. Isn't this wine sour! No, I'm getting used to it—getting to like it. Hasn't half—I mean, it's got a nice smooth way of going down." As Sally checked herself she realised that she was now so much at ease with Gaga that she no longer worried about her pronunciation or her words when she was with him. Worry? Sally's conceited-

ness soared into the air and frowned down upon the faltering Gaga with something like scorn. Poor Gaga! thought Sally. Instantly her hardness returned, and she looked at his lined face and the pale lips that hung a little away from his teeth in sign of ill-health. She saw his dark grey morning coat, and the slip inside the waistcoat, and his sober tie. And it seemed to Sally that she saw right into the simple mind of Gaga. He was so simple, like the hire purchase system. He was about the simplest man she had ever seen, for his tongue could hardly utter more than the tamest of words and phrases, and he never seemed to Sally to keep anything back.

"And yet, you know," she went on, following Gaga's remark and this train of throught, "there's lots more to know about people than just what you see—and what they do and say. If you know them ever so well, you only know a bit of them. You don't know me. You think I'm a little girl in the workroom, and a worker, and all that."

"I think you're a marvel!" ejaculated Gaga.

"Yes, well, when you've got to the end of thinking I'm a marvel, what happens? You don't *know* me any better. I might be a poisoner, or a . . . or a . . ." Sally's invention failed her. "I might keep a shop, or serve a bar, or be an actress," she went on, recovering fertility. "I mean, in the evenings."

"Yes," said Gaga, dubiously. "I suppose you might." He was struck with a rather superfine notion. "But you're not," he concluded. He enjoyed a manifest triumph.

"No." Sally raised a declamatory finger. "But if I *was,* you wouldn't know it."

They had reached an impassable spot in their talk. Sally had confounded Gaga. Neither he nor she was quite as mentally alert as they had both been when

hungry; and the Chianti was beginning to make them drowsy and rather slow-witted. But having embarked upon the question of possible knowledge of character they could not, in consideration of their slight heaviness, be expected to relinquish a topic so circular and so suggestive of personal intimacy. As the wine acted more powerfully upon them it was more and more to themselves that their thoughts and speeches turned.

"I feel sometimes that I'm a great fool," confessed Gaga. "But I'm not really a fool. I see a lot, and . . . I don't seem able to act on it. D'you understand what I mean?"

"Weak," Sally vouchsafed, wine-candid. Gaga glanced quickly at her.

"I don't think I'm weak. I . . ." His thoughts strayed. "See, I've never had much of a chance to show what I can do. My mother's such a much stronger character than I am."

Sally nodded, and sipped again at the thick glass from which she was drinking.

"I'm strong," she said. "I'm hard . . . tough. If I make up my *mind* . . ."

"Yes. I'm like that," insisted Gaga. It was so preposterous that Sally could only look measuringly at him with a puzzled contempt that might have been read.

"I'm stronger'n you are," she answered. "I'm small; but I don't mind what I do. You're a *good* boy. I'm not. I'm bad. I'm . . . you don't know what goes on in my head." Suddenly exasperated, she went on: "That's what I meant. You think I'm just a quiet little thing. I'm not. You don't know *what* I think about. I want to do all sorts of things. I want to be rich, and have a good time, and have lots of . . . lots of *power*. I want to get on. If anybody gets in my way I push 'em out of it. If anybody gets in *your* way you stand aside."

"I don't. I get my own way, but not by fighting," Gaga said.

"Oho! I don't fight," retorted Sally. "They're afraid to fight me."

Gaga smiled.

"They're afraid of hurting you," he suggested. "But I know just what you mean." His confidence was unshakable.

"I kick 'em in the stomach," Sally asserted. "Anywhere."

"Yes. They wouldn't take liberties with you."

"Not unless I wanted them to," said Sally, abruptly sober. "They wouldn't try it on. None of the girls ever worry me. When I first came they did. They were saucy. I soon stopped that. I got a tongue, and they found it out. Now Miss Summers——"

"Don't let's talk about the business," pleaded Gaga. Sally was arrested.

"Funny!" she exclaimed. "We haven't, have we!"

"It's so much nicer being . . . friends."

One of Gaga's hands was stretched across the table. With a sense of mischief Sally allowed him to take her own hand. Then she moved it quickly.

"They're looking at us," she whispered to him. "Those waitress girls." Instantly she was free. She had the thought that a real man would have held her hand for a moment longer. All the same, she enjoyed her power over Gaga. The little unreadable smile that so excited him was upon her face, and the knowledge of power was in her heart.

They sat for a little while over coffee; and then Sally began to put on her gloves. A few minutes later they were out in the dark street, and pausing to discover the points of the compass. As they stood, a great gust of wind came sweeping along from the southeast, and at

its onset the two became strangely embraced, Gaga's arm being round Sally, and the brim of her hat against his breast. They both laughed, and Sally stood upright; but she did not move so violently that Gaga must withdraw his arm. She was amused and elated at contact with him. Gaga, encouraged, drew her closer.

"Oo!" murmured Sally. She let him see her laughing face.

Gaga, very excited, lowered his head. Sally jerked her own head upon one side with lightning speed, and felt his lips clumsily upon her ear. Twice he kissed her, convulsively hugging her to his side. Then Sally, rather breathless, but not at all discomposed, pulled herself away.

"Now, now; that's enough," she said. They were both grinning; but of the two only Sally was cool. She could tell that Gaga was trembling slightly, and when a little later they parted he held her hand for a long time, and sought timidly to draw her to him again for another kiss. Sally, however, ignored the pressure, and left him standing in the yellow shop and street lights, while she rode securely homeward in her omnibus. Her last glimpse was of newspaper bills lying upon the pavement, and of men and women in motion against the lights, and Gaga standing watching her out of sight. Then she looked round the omnibus, at some other girls, and an old man who wore two waistcoats, and the conductor; and her face again puckered into a smile.

"Doesn't half think he's a devil," she thought, demurely.

Then other thoughts of Gaga arose, and Sally frowned a little. She had a sudden feeling that she was on difficult ground. She was not afraid, not nervous; but her imaginings darted swiftly here and there at the bidding of a knowledge that she must not at this juncture make any false step.

xvii

All the way home Sally had the one subject, the one series of speculations, hammering at her attention. She was again sensible; she was shrewd and perceptive. Gaga was a funny old stick, she thought; funny and weak and nice. She could play upon him with ease. A touch, and he was thrilled; a kiss, and he was beside himself. And yet what did he want—what did he *think* he wanted? And what did Sally herself want? She did not know. She felt at a loss, excited and almost wanton. Yet so much depended upon all this that she dared not make a mistake. Gaga's goodwill was of enormous importance. In his hands lay some of her future. If she could help him, earn rewards, understand the business, she could master everything. And Madam—what if Madam died? Supposing she suddenly died, and left Gaga in control of the business, what would happen? Sally hoisted her shoulders in doubt. Gaga might sell the whole thing. He might run it himself. He would keep Miss Summers . . .

"Oh, I wish I was older!" cried Sally, impatiently. "I could do it, but they wouldn't let me. They'd think I couldn't. I could! Not all at once, but in a little while. If he'd hold on. Supposing he . . . wants me . . ." Her thoughts flitted away. She had a quick picture of Gaga as a lover, of herself managing everything by keeping him at her side with cajolery and parsimoniously-yielded delights. But he might grow tired of her; and then where would she be? Sally did not trust men now; she too clearly saw that once they were no longer tantalised they were liable to become sated and uneager. She was face to face with that speculation here. It all depended upon Gaga, upon the strength of her hold upon him. Could she so play that she reaped all the advan-

tage she needed without giving anything at all? She was deperately tempted. She so greatly craved the power which only Gaga could give her. Well, what did he want? It was not enough that she should recognise her power to excite him: she needed much more than a few odd favours. And she was afraid to do anything to force him to grant whatever he could. In any case, what could he give her? She was too observant to be deceived as to his powerlessness. She saw him as a cypher; but as one who might one day—perhaps quite soon—own the whole business. Who else was there to make him do anything with it? There was nobody. Sally knew her own strength. What she could not guess was the best means of using it to her own advantage.

She arrived home to find her mother in bed, with her short grey hair scantily bedecking the pillow. At Sally's entrance, Mrs. Minto opened weary eyes, and looked at her with a sort of hatred. Sally knew the expression: it was full of suspicion and dread and solicitude, the result of Mrs. Minto's lonely evening of speculation.

"Hullo, ma!" she cried, recklessly. "Here I am. And I haven't been working. And there's nothing to fuss about. And that's all about that."

"Where you been?" sternly demanded Mrs. Minto.

"Well," began Sally, "if you *must* know, Madam's worse. She's ill. Think she's going to die. And I been talking to Mr. Bertram, and giving him good advice. I'm a mother to that man. What he'd do without me I can't think."

"Oo, Mr. Bertram!" It was clearly a warning cry. "Mr. Bertram! Oo, Sally!"

"Soppy, ma. We call him 'Gaga.' He's weak, you know. Cries over his work, like a kid. Wants somebody to give him a bit of backbone."

"Confidence," suggested Mrs. Minto, intrigued by the

picture. She said no more, but rolled over and stared at the dim wall until sleep crept upon her and annulled her reflections.

Sally was struck by the word. Confidence! That was what Gaga needed! Half the time he was afraid of his own shadow. Quickly her brain refashioned the meal she had had with Gaga. Poor lamb, he hadn't got any confidence! Madam had kept him down. He wanted rousing. Once get his blood up, and he might do something really . . . For the first time Sally was genuinely interested in Gaga. She had never honestly thought of helping him for his own sake. All she had thought of was her own future. And now her mother had put Gaga in a new light. Sally almost thought well of him. He might be rather bigger than she had supposed. What if he were?

Yes, but what did Gaga want of Sally? You don't kiss a girl because she is anything but a girl. It was a profundity. Gaga had kissed Sally because. . . .

Sally turned away to hide from any glance of her sleeping mother the gleeful smile which had made her face radiant. She had been kissed because she had encouraged Gaga to kiss her; but he was so timid that he would never have done it if he had not very greatly desired to kiss her. She wondered what he thought about her. He talked of their being "friends"; he was half silly about her; he had kissed her and had wanted to kiss her again. Having begun, he would want to go on kissing her. And then, what? He would be afraid to kiss her at their next meeting; but he would all the time be watching his opportunity to do so. Was Sally going to give him his opportunity? Was she going to give him the confidence necessary for the task of using his opportunity? She was still gay, still amused and self-confident; but there was a doubt in her eyes. She wanted to know more. She

wanted to know all that was still hidden from her. All the same, during the whole of her questioning of Gaga's ultimate aspirations, she never once lost the consciousness that the next step lay with herself. Was she going to give him that necessary confidence?

"Oh, I think so," thought Sally, deliberately; and smiled almost to laughter as she lay with her face upon the pillow and was aware of the whole of her warm body, from the tip of her nose to her round heels and the eager fingers bunched close to her breast. "I think so . . ." she repeated, with more humorousness. She had a vision of Gaga with his chocolate eyes glowing into her own as the result of the wine and his proximity to herself. She saw his thin lips stretched, and the faint red under his grey cheeks, and his thin hair. She felt his lips clumsily kissing her ear, the nervous clutching of his arms. Sally was pleased. She knew that sleep was almost upon her, and heard Mrs. Minto's deep breathing a foot away from the back of her head. Yawningly, she snuggled more comfortably into her pillow, and as consciousness slipped away a distant murmur seemed to repeat: "Yes . . . yes . . . I . . . think so." In a mood of expectant triumph she slept, sure for the moment of the course of future events.

xviii

All the next day Sally's nerves were on edge. She had slept heavily, and had awakened unrefreshed. She had made her way to Madame Gala's in a tame morning mood, once again self-distrustful, very much waiting upon events. The sight of Nosey checking the times of arrival, and still more the gloomy aspect of a half-empty workroom, chilled her. Miss Summers looked spiteful, Rose Anstey was sniffling with a cold, the others were listless

and tired. It was a muggy morning, and all spirits were low. Sally's were lower than any others in the room. She began to work with only half her ordinary attentiveness, broke her cotton, snapped a needle, fidgetted. Her eyelids were hot, and she felt a headache begin to throb faintly in promise of greater effort later in the day. She was restless and wretched, looking at the door which probably hid Gaga. Even the memory of last night's kisses was stale and unsatisfactory. As she drew her breath in a half-sob, Sally longed suddenly for Toby. She longed for his strong arms, his possessive air, his muscular strength. And as she thought of Toby a tear came to her eye, and she felt that life was not worth living. A consciousness of childish need for support destroyed all her confidence at a blow. How she hated all these stupid girls! How she longed for something—she could not imagine what—which should take her out of their company. Complaint filled her mind. Why should she have to work, to go backwards and forwards between the workroom and that miserable home where her mother stewed incessantly and followed the course of her monotonous days? It was a mood of pure reaction, but it made Sally desperate. Her head began to ache more noticeably. She was almost crying.

That, perhaps, was the condition of them all. None of the girls spoke, and all looked black and miserable as they bent over their work, or slacked and glanced around them. Outside, the rain began to fall, and the sky was grey with cloud. The lights had to be switched on, and they cast a deceptive glow upon all work, and idiotic shadows of the moving fingers of the girls. Miss Summers glowered and rubbed the tip of her nose; and at each crack or rustle of a chair or a piece of material she glanced sharply up, as though she were fighting with an impulse to scream. Sally felt that if Miss Summers

had screamed they would all have screamed. She herself was tempted to scream first, so as to see what would happen. She thought that all work would be instantly thrown down, and that everybody would answer her cry, and then begin noisily to sob. Even miserable as she was, the thought of this avalanche of feminine excitability made Sally snuffle with amusement. She pictured Gaga running out of his room, distraught, looking yellow and bilious, his eyes staring wildly out of his head, as do the eyes of prawns. And then? And then Rose Anstey would fall bellowing into his arms, and Sally would tear her away, and claim Gaga before them all. . . .

How astounded he would be! But anything would be better than this wretched suppressed exasperation which was making the atmosphere of the workroom unbearable. Fortunately a girl finished the work she was doing, and took it to Miss Summers.

"Very bad!" snapped Miss Summers. "It's not even straight! You must do it again. Naughty girl, to waste that silk like this!"

The girl began weakly to cry. All the others stared viciously at her, gloating over her distress, hating her, and thankful to have some object at which to discharge their suppressed venom. They would have liked to beat her. Savagery shone in their malignant eyes. All became sadistic in their enjoyment of the weeping girl as she crept back to her place. Only Miss Summers grew rather red, and swallowed quickly, and was ashamed.

"Nancy!" she called. "What is it? Aren't you well?"

Nancy put her head upon her outstretched arms, and they could hear the long dreadful sobs that shook her body. Upon every face Sally read the same message; the curled lips, the pinched nostrils, all indicated the general strain.

"We're all like that this morning, Miss Summers," she said, almost with defiance. "It's the weather. That's what it is."

The other girls all turned from Nancy and transferred to Sally their mounting malevolence. They would have liked to see her swept from her place. They could have scratched and bitten her with fury. And yet, a moment or two after she had spoken, there was a perceptible relief. Nancy stole out of the room, to finish her cry and bathe her face, and one of the girls—her friend—went after her. There was a pause in work. A window was opened, and some air lightened the oppression. Sally remained seated, while the others crowded to the window, and slowly recovered her own composure. And then, in five minutes, when everybody resumed, it was found that things were not so bad after all, and Nancy's work was rectified, and Rose Anstey blew her nose and looked disagreeable, and some of them talked; so that presently all became more animated, and the sky lightened, and the day was less trying. Only Sally's head continued to ache, and her spirits to falter. But she no longer sighed for Toby. A curious dread of him came into her consciousness, which she could not understand. She was afraid. She felt defensive towards him, and explanatory. Under her attention all sorts of impulses were at work. Pictures of Toby in different circumstances began to flash into her mind, always blurring in an instant; while the memory of her dinner with Gaga grew stronger and more remarkable. Not knowing what she was doing, Sally pushed her work away, and sat in a brown study, until she became aware that she was under observation.

Sally met these cruel stares with immediately assumed equanimity, and she once more drew the work towards her; and in a few moments the girls forgot Sally, and chattered a little together. And by the time their atten-

tion was withdrawn wholly it was the luncheon interval, which meant more to all of them than usual, since it once more gave the girls an opportunity for standing up and moving about. They grouped, and went slowly towards the room where they always ate; and Sally was able to open the other door for an instant, only to discover that Madam's room was empty. With a sinking heart, she followed the others, again beset by a loss of confidence.

In the afternoon she was sent out by Miss Summers to match some silk, and this gave Sally relief without which she must have ended the day feeling ill. As it was, she came back just as they were making tea, and her own cup of tea sent the headache away. For the first time that day, Sally heard herself laughing. She was telling Muriel of a fight between two dogs, and how a man had been overthrown in the mud through trying to part the dogs; and when Muriel laughed Sally laughed also, which made the other girls prick up their ears and grow more lively. There was a great change in the general atmosphere after tea. The constraint disappeared, and everybody became more normal. Needles were more adroitly used; the light improved; a general air of contentment arose. Sally no longer thought of Toby, or of Gaga. She was making a dream for herself, out of a motor car she had seen, and a handsome soldier, and the way a commissionaire had stepped out of her way. She needed few materials for her dream, and was a fine lady for the rest of the afternoon.

Dreaming, however, has its penalties; and for this occasion Sally was punished by having to stay rather late in order to finish what she was doing. The other girls began to go home; but Sally and Miss Summers remained at their tasks. The delay produced a strange experience for Sally, because when they were alone together Miss

Summers began abruptly to talk. She hummed a little at first, and then broke into a long speech which had been seething all day in her mind.

"I hope you don't think I was nasty to Nancy this morning, Sally. She's a funny girl. She's in love, you know; and thinks of nothing but this man. And he's a married man, too, and not a good man, Sally. He'd think nothing of leading a girl like Nancy into doing wrong, and leaving her to get on as well as she can. Well, that's not right, Sally." Miss Summers felt for her handkerchief, and Sally noticed with astonishment that there were tears in her eyes. "You see, when a man's married he ought to be careful what he does. Now once, when I was a girl, I'd got my head full of the sort of things that young girls have—not you, Sally; you're too sensible;—and I met a man, and thought he was the . . . well, I thought he was the finest man in the world. He wasn't. He'd got a poor wretched wife that he neglected, and he drank, and when he ran away they found he'd been betting with money that didn't belong to him. And he very nearly took me with him. Fortunately, I didn't go. I was afraid to go—though I didn't know about his wife. He said he'd marry me when we got away. Well, I thought it was funny. I said, 'Why not before?' and he said, 'You don't understand. What if we didn't suit each other?' I said, 'Why shouldn't we? Other people get married.' And all that sort of thing I said. Well, I wanted to go, and wanted to go; and at last I didn't, and I was thankful afterwards. Now Nancy's man is a shopwalker somewhere. He's got no money, but he's good-looking, you know, and girls think a lot of that when they're young; and also he's one of those men who give a girl the idea that he can have twenty others if he wants them. That's what upsets a girl. She

thinks she's got to make her mind up in a hurry, or lose him, d'you see?"

"More fool she," remarked Sally. "Pooh!"

"So *I* say. Mind, in Nancy's case, she's just in love. He may not want her. She doesn't know. And it's the uncertainty that keeps her like this. Far better if she married some steady young fellow who'd make her a good husband. But girls don't think of that. They don't like steady fellows, any more than young fellows like steady girls."

"That's true," said Sally, thoughtfully. "They want a bit of ginger."

"Well, sometimes I think nobody ought to marry until they're well on in life."

"They'd miss a lot," Sally murmured.

"Eh? Well, it's a puzzle to me. Look at Nancy. What is it she wants? She's got forty or fifty years more to live."

"But you don't think like that," breathed Sally. "It's love."

Miss Summers gave a great sigh, and rubbed the tip of her nose with the back of her forefinger. She was seriously perplexed at the interruption from one so sagacious.

"*You'll* think twice before you marry for just love, and nothing else," said she.

Sally's little white face was turned away. She was apparently concentrated upon her work.

"Perhaps I shall," she admitted. "You never know what you'll do till the time comes."

"You can make up your mind to be careful," said Miss Summers. "It's not the first man who makes the best husband."

Sally crouched in her place. Her heart was beating so fast that she felt as though she were suffocating. Miss

Summers could not appreciate the effect of her words, because she had gone back again to the subject of Nancy and her married shopwalker.

"You ought to have *seen* that child's work today!"

"Perhaps she's going to have a baby?" suggested Sally. It gave Miss Summers a great shock.

"Oh! D'you think so?" she exclaimed, her eyes wide open with horror. "Oh, no!"

"You'd have thought they were all going to have 'em, the way the girls all looked and acted this morning. They were all potty. Silly fools."

Miss Summers gave a sigh of relief, and then she laughed a little.

"We were all rather grumpy this morning," she admitted. "It's the weather. Always upsets people. Doctor Johnson said it didn't."

"Who's he? Doctors don't know anything at all. Only take advantage of other people's ignorance. They frighten people, you know, looking wise, and making you put out your tongue, and all."

"I don't know what we should do without them," sighed Miss Summers. "Of course, there's always the patent medicines; but I never found anything that cured my indigestion."

"Only chewing prop'ly," grimly suggested Sally.

Miss Summers abruptly rolled up her work at this unsympathetic remark, and took off her pinafore. She stood uncertainly by the window.

"I've been keeping you," she said. "But I *am* worried about that child. I do hope she hasn't been silly. At her age they've got no sense at all. They can't see an inch before their nose. You coming now, Sally? All right, slam the door after you . . . Don't stay too late."

Ten minutes afterwards Miss Summers had gone. Sally waited a little while, to give her time to reach the

street and remember anything that might bring her back. Then, very quietly, she took off her own pinafore, and stole across the room and listened at Gaga's door. She could hear nothing. Sharply, she tapped, and listened again.

"Come in!" said a voice.

Sally opened the door, standing there in her grey dress, with her hair brilliant, and her whole face smiling. And Gaga, looking up from his work, saw her thus as a vision, a happy vision for tired eyes. He smiled in return and Sally advanced, without any shyness or assumed shyness, into the room.

"Wondered if you were here," she said cheerfully. "Everybody else has gone. Miss Summers and all. I'm working on something. Oo, hasn't it been a day! The girls all had the fidgets. I've been quite ill all day."

"Ill?" demanded Gaga. "Not . . . not really ill? Oh, I'm . . . I'm so sorry. Poor Sally!"

"Headache," mentioned Sally, rather lugubriously, so as to encourage his pity.

"Headache? Oh, poor little girl! So have I."

Sally gave a little laugh. It contained all sorts of provocative shades of meaning.

"Hn," she said. "Funny us *both* having headaches. You still got yours?"

Gaga nodded. She went farther towards him, hesitated, and then still nearer.

"Very bad," groaned Gaga, and Sally could see the heaviness round his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," she said in a soft voice. Then: "My hand's cool. Shall I?" She put her hand to Gaga's forehead, and felt how burning it was. She felt him grow rigid at the contact, and saw his face betray his sensitiveness to her touch. Sally's smile deepened in mischief. She was playing with him, playing with fire and Gaga at

the same time, and only lightly amused at her employment. But she was still apart from him, standing erect, with her right arm outstretched. There was not yet any intimacy in her attitude. Nor could she see his face very plainly without peeping over her arm.

"That better?" she asked.

"Beautiful." Gaga tried to move his head. Failing, he put his hand to her wrist, pulled it down, and pressed his lips to her fingers.

"Now, now!" warned Sally. "I'm curing your headache."

Mildly he permitted the withdrawal of her hand and its replacement upon his brow. But in a moment Sally, perhaps growing more daring, exchanged her right hand for her left; and this meant approaching Gaga more closely, and the partial encirclement of his head with her arm. She was quite near him, as Gaga must have known; but he did not dare to put his arm round her, as he might easily have done. Sally, so experienced, guessed at his temptation, at his fear, and relished both. She was also aware of a singular tenderness towards him, a protective, superior wisdom that made Gaga seem to be a child in his trepidation. To her an embrace meant so much less than it meant to him, and she knew quite well that a flirtatious man would have recognised the game that was in progress and risked a rebuff because of the successive return. Sally was still so far from deliberately exploiting Gaga that she did not feel impatient at his slowness. She savoured it, appreciating the fact that he shrank, knowing that when she wanted him to do anything she could always manage Gaga with the lightest touch. And that was why, in a moment, she allowed herself contact with his shoulder. Gaga's arm mechanically rose, and was about her waist, quite unpossessively. His face was moved with a conflict of emotions. Sally

recognised temptation and self-consciousness, and also, with amusement, a sense of his own incomparable daring.

"You *are* a devil, aren't you!" she whispered. Instantly she knew that she had made a mistake. His arm relaxed. It was only when she drew his aching head to her breast that she recovered her mastery of him. It was the only mistake she had made, and it was at that time the last, for she learnt at once that he was sensitive to ridicule. She had stepped too far, and had thereby, for a moment, endangered her sport. She was smiling again, but she had breathed quickly, at the knowledge of danger.

"How's the head?" she asked. "My hand's getting hot."

"Very bad," answered Gaga, dreading her withdrawal.

"Let me get a wet handkerchief."

"No, no. Don't move. I . . . I don't want you to move."

Unconsciously, Sally gave a little sigh. It was all so easy, so much a question of his being content with whatever she gave, that the adventure was fading. It was ceasing to amuse her.

"That's enough," she said. "Now I'm going home." She did not move, and Gaga's clasp tightened.

"No," he murmured entreatingly. "Not yet."

"*Must* go." She took her hand away from his forehead, lingeringly. Gaga held her to him with rigidity. "Let me go." He took no notice, and Sally's hand rested gently upon his shoulder. At last: "Well?" said she.

"Don't go."

There was the slightest struggle, and Sally was free. Gaga's face was quite red. She stood looking down at him, on her lips that same quizzical smile. Gaga could not bear it. He rose quickly, and at her flight followed breathlessly. She was again lightly imprisoned, her head to his breast, and his arms giving small convulsive pres-

sures as he sought to retain her. She could tell his physical weakness, and his feeble, excited desire for her, and she felt his face pressed to her hair. Again Gaga kissed Sally, but she continued to withhold her lips, so that he approached no nearer than her cheek.

"You . . . you *must* know I love you," breathed Gaga.

"Do I?" asked Sally, coolly. "I don't. Why should I?"

"Can't you tell?" He was speaking directly into her ear, so that she felt his breath. "I love you . . . like this!" He held her with all his strength, and gave her cheek a fevered, gnawing kiss. "D'you see, Sally? I love you."

"How's your headache?" asked Sally.

"I . . . oh, Sally. Better . . . better. But Sally! I love you. Don't you love me a little? Sally!" There was a long silence. Consideringly, Sally looked down, faintly excited, but unemotional. He vainly sought to achieve a mutual kiss; but she kept her head turned away. Strange! Her brain was perfectly clear! She was aware of every contact with him, knew his every wish; and was unmoved. How different it was from when she was with Toby! Gaga's voice resumed: "I think you l . . . love me a little, Sally, my dear, my angel."

"Angel! Good lord!" ejaculated Sally. She put her hands to his breast, forcing him a little away. "D'you think I'm an angel?"

"Yes!" came defiantly from Gaga.

"You're mad!" cried Sally, with contempt. "You don't know what you're talking about. And even if you *are* in love with me, as you say, what does it mean? You'd soon get tired of me. You'd begin to think I *wasn't* an angel. What's the good of it all?"

Gaga looked astounded.

"But if *you* love *me*," he stammered.

Sally's face was darkened. She had tears in her eyes, and her mouth was thin and hard. There was altogether a hardness in her expression that terrified Gaga.

"Even if I did," she said in a grim voice.

"But we could be married," he urged.

Married! Sally's heart gave a jump. Her cheeks were suffused. Married! She could hardly conceal her amazement. He had flown right past her expectation by that single word. Sally was aghast, forced to exercise all her self-control to prevent him from seeing how staggered she was.

"Married!" she said, deprecatingly. "What would you want to marry a girl like me for?" But as she spoke she no longer meant the words which had been conceived in honesty. A storm of temptation was upon her. Married to Gaga! Why, *nothing* could stop her! Married to him, she would be unassailable. It was not to be believed.

"Because I love you. Sally, do say 'yes.' " He was beseeching. His grey face was flushed, his lips eagerly parted, his eyes radiant. Gaga seemed transfigured. And his embrace was strengthened each instant by his vehement desire for her.

"You love me?" Sally's voice had become thick and stupid as she struggled to maintain her clearness of judgment in face of this overwhelming proposal.

"Say 'yes,' " urged Gaga. "Say 'yes.' It would be so wonderful. Sally, I've never . . . never been in love before. I've . . . never wanted a girl like this. You're so . . ."

"What am I?" Sally voice was tender, lingering. The tears came again to her eyes, so touched was she by his earnestness and his gentleness, so puzzled by the unforeseen situation.

"So lovely," Gaga breathed. His lips came nearer, and

she did not withdraw. He kissed her mouth at last, and again; and at her response the kiss became long and possessive. "You lovely girl," he went on. "We'll be married . . . and . . . and so happy."

"I don't know," cried Sally. "I don't know."

"Dear!" he begged.

"I'm not sure. Perhaps you'll be sorry to-morrow that you asked me. Will you? Sorry? Such things *have* been known to happen." Her voice was quite hard, because her temptation was so great.

"I'll never change. I love you."

"I wonder." Sally shook her head. "I'll tell you to-morrow." She was still dubious, suspicious.

"Let me get a license."

Sally's heart jumped again. He had once more surprised her, and she had supposed herself altogether beyond surprise. A license! Her quick glance could fathom no deceit, no inconceivable sportiveness in Gaga.

"Oh! You *are* in a hurry!" she exclaimed, delayingly. "Frightened you *will* change."

"I'm frightened of losing you."

Sally laughed a little, held up her face, and kissed him. Still she was puzzled.

"To-morrow. But you'll be sorry by then. I won't promise."

She found it not unpleasant to be loved in this fervid, nervous fashion. It amused her. But she was curiously unmoved, and when he had put her into her omnibus Sally breathed almost with relief. Strange to feel that relief after parting from the man you might be going to marry! Sally jerked her head. She remembered suddenly that Miss Summers had said earlier in the day. "*You'll* think twice before you marry for just love, and nothing else," Miss Summers had said. "You're right, my dear," thought Sally. And then there came galloping into her memory

a recollection that made Sally blanch. "It's not the first man who makes the best husband," Miss Summers had said. Not the first man! The reason for Sally's fear was explained. She had known all along why she was afraid, and had pressed back the knowledge from her attention, so that it should not interfere with her actions. The first man was Toby; and it was of Toby that she was afraid—of Toby and his love for her; and, more than all, of her strangely smouldering love for Toby.

XIX

What had she been doing to forget Toby? Had she forgotten him at all? Somehow Toby had a little faded from her mind in these days, because he was on a voyage longer than usual, and she had not heard from him. Toby, her lover! Only when she had been a little frightened or distressed had she longed for his protective arms. Otherwise he had slipped into a sure place in her self-knowledge. He was the man she loved, strong and rough, the first to capture her heart, and until now the only man to hold her imagination. At the thought of deserting him Sally shrank. She belonged to Toby. Toby belonged to her. She had been going to marry him. If she had not loved Toby she would ruthlessly have shouldered him aside; but she could not do that, because he was her lover. And she was afraid. If once she betrayed him, Toby might kill her. She became terrified at the idea. Men killed their girls for jealousy's sake. She had often read in the papers of what were called "love tragedies."

Sally did not want to die. She wanted to rise to power, to riches. And Gaga offered her the way to attain her ambition. Married to him she could have all, or almost all, she wanted. If she refused him she might lose everything. She might lose her place with Madame Gala, she

might . . . How harassed she was! It was such a temptation! Gaga, with money, and everything that he could offer; and Toby, with love that she craved, and years of waiting, and a poky house, and his opposition to all she might want to do upon her own account. She had a vision of his lowering face, his savage mouth. She remembered all her joys in his arms. A shudder shook Sally at thought of his vengefulness, his fierce strength. And then, when she was married to Gaga, she would be mistress of so much that she desired. It was a desperate problem. The more she thought of it, the more tormented Sally became.

She was still in active distress when she reached home; and her headache of the morning had returned. Bright colour showed in her pale cheeks, and her eyes were brilliant with excitement. She was at high tension. The first sight of their room, and her mother's squalid figure, produced a violent effect upon Sally's thoughts. Anything to escape from this! Anything! But what of Toby? His strong hands could crush the life out of her. His jealousy would be so unmeasured . . . He would kill Gaga. He would kill her. Sally was carried to an extreme pitch of fear. Life was so precious to her. And she loved Toby.

Did she still love him? Did he still love her? They were both older; separation had made each of them less dependent upon the other than they had been at first, and even although her love was jubilant when Toby returned on leave she was no longer the rapturous girl of even a year before. Long and long Sally remained torn between her two desires. She did not sleep at all, but lay turning from side to side and longing for oblivion or the daylight. She had never been so confronted with great temptation and great fear. Her head ached more and more. She could not cry, or sleep, or forget. She lay with open eyes, watching the window for the dawn. And when the morn-

ing broke she was still undetermined. The choice was too difficult.

Breakfast was uneatable; her journey to work was a dream. She shrank from going into the workroom, from seeing Gaga. All her confidence had disappeared. She was a bewildered little girl—not eighteen, but a child still without sense of direction. At one minute Toby seemed the only choice to make, but principally because she was afraid of what he might do if she married Gaga; and when she forgot her fear she no longer hesitated between love and ambition. She argued that she no longer loved Toby. She never once considered her feeling for Gaga. She hardly thought of him, or of what marriage to him might mean. Her eye was all to the consequences. It was so throughout, whether she thought of Toby or his new rival. All her thoughts were anticipations.

As she sat at work she began to lose fear of Toby. She felt she could always manage him, explain to him. She pretended that they would be friends; though the thought of Toby married to another girl gave her a sharp horror. If she married, it was different. She did not imagine what Toby might feel—only what he might do. She was thus the complete egoist. Not Toby's happiness or unhappiness was implicated; but only her own dominant desire. If she had still been unsatisfied in her love for Toby, she might have valued him more; but she knew all that he could teach her of love, and already her strong eagerness for him was becoming old and accustomed. The one restraint she had was fear of what he might do; and that fear was beginning to decline in face of stronger impulses towards the opportunity which marriage with Gaga would produce. And just in this crucial stage of her reflections came a most striking fresh influence. It was brought by Miss Summers, who returned from the telephone with a solemn expression upon her face.

"Sally," she said. "Come here." When Sally approached her, Miss Summers pretended to give some instructions; but in reality, under her breath, she murmured: "Sally, don't tell the other girls; but Madam's worse this morning. Her temperature's 103." Her warning frown emphasised the meaning of the words. It made Sally's heart begin to beat fast. Madam . . . Madam . . .

With her head low, Sally bent over her work. But that frown had brought decision to her mind. She would marry Gaga. It was so important that she should not miss this chance that she would marry him at once. She *must* do so. It was essential. What if he had grown frightened?

That was her new spur of fear. Toby was forgotten. She was on fire for the marriage. It had now become the only conclusion to her doubts. She must take the earliest opportunity of seeing Gaga, of conveying her acceptance, of making sure of him. Her fingers trembled, so important did time now seem to Sally. Her one anxiety was lest she should have to kindle his eagerness anew. Troubled but resolute, she tried in vain to work. Every sound made her start. All her attention was distracted from the sewing and concentrated upon the possibility of an interview with Gaga. Yet a shyness made her afraid to leave her place and go into Madam's room. The other girls would notice. What if they did? They would soon know that they could not treat her with anything but humility. She would have untold power over them. Sally almost recoiled from the knowledge of what power she would wield in the business once she was Gaga's wife. It seemed to her incredible. Her mind strayed to Miss Summers, Miss Rapson, the jealous Rose. . . . How would they like it? What would they do? Sally imagined the news reaching them, imagined their fear of her, their jealousy, their cutting remarks about herself. And she

laughed, knowing that she would be out of reach of any of the harm that they might wish her.

While she was thus contemplating a development, the door of Gaga's room opened, and he came quickly into the workroom. Sally's heart seemed to stop beating. She felt sick with dread. He wore a flower in his buttonhole. His first glance was for Sally, as her own lightning scrutiny showed. He was white, but he smiled. His eagerness of inquiry was manifest. Sally could not help smiling in return, although she was trembling, and knew that he too must be trembling. She gave the faintest possible nod, and saw the colour start to his cheek. Gaga was checked for an instant in his progress. His smile broadened, his head was thrown back. At that moment he looked almost like a determined man, so vividly did Sally's nod cause a new ichor of confidence to run in his veins.

XX

On a bright morning about ten days later, Sally lay in bed watching her mother prepare the breakfast upon their oil stove. Although the year was in its last months it was still warm and sunny, and Mrs. Minto clambered about the room half-dressed, with her grey hair hanging behind in ragged tails. With her bodice off she looked more than ever meagre, her thin face sharper and greyer than of old, and her movements more uncertain. As Sally watched her mother she realised that the unsightly walls and battered furniture were just of a piece with the creeping figure. What she did not understand was that Mrs. Minto was so used to the furniture, which she had known during the whole of her married life, that she did not recognise its dilapidation. But Sally had no time for thought of her mother. She was excited. Her tongue

came out between her teeth, and she looked at the ceiling. At last, in a laconic voice, she said:

"Ma!" Mrs. Minto glanced wearily at her. Sally considered her speech with a further smile, so that Mrs. Minto became irritated, and went on with her preparations in a rather indignant way. "Ma," resumed Sally, relishingly, "I shan't be home to-night."

Mrs. Minto started. She became instantly alert.

"Oh yes you will, my girl," she cried sternly. "None o' that!"

"Yes, I shan't be home to-night," repeated Sally. "Nor to-morrow night, either."

Mrs. Minto left her work and came to the bedside. She was like a snarling bitch, savage over her threatened young.

"Sally!" she exclaimed, in a rough voice. "What you doing! What d'you mean? Of course you'll be home. You're not going to play any tricks with me, my gel."

"I shan't be coming home," continued Sally. "Not ever. I'm getting married to-day."

Mrs. Minto sat down upon the bed.

"Married!" she screamed. "Married! Why, who you going to marry! What d'you mean? Silly girl, trying to frighten me!"

"Don't get excited, ma. I'm going to look after you. The fact is, I'm . . . well, *you'll* be all right. Nothing to worry about."

"Who *is* he?" demanded Mrs. Minto. "Who *is* he?" She was desperately agitated. "Sally, I'm you mother . . . Oh, you bad girl! You been hiding . . . I knew you was hiding something. I knew where them fast frocks was leading you!"

Sally was enjoying the scene. But she suddenly checked herself.

"Ma, I'm marrying a rich man. I'm marrying Madam's son."

"Madam's *son*!"

"Yes." She was complacent. "Those fast frocks lead to the registry office."

"Reg . . . Not in church? It's . . . Sally!"

"What I say," cried Sally.

"A rich man!"

"Mr. Bertram. And what's more he loves me. And you won't have to do any more charing. Only sit here and gorge yourself on the police news, like a lady, and . . ."

"Married!" gasped Mrs. Minto. She gave a foolish giggling laugh, and the tears ran down her cheeks. "Is it *true,* Sally?"

Sally held up her left hand, brought it blazing from under the bedclothes. Mrs. Minto seized the hand, squeezed it hard, and pored over the brilliants.

"Well!" she exclaimed. Then she shook her head, and wiped the tears from her cheeks. A great sobriety appeared in her expression. Anxiety was her dominating concern. "D'you love him, Sally? You ought to have told me. I ought to have seen him. He hasn't asked for you. He ought to have come and asked your mother."

"Madam's ill. I told him I'd tell you. You got to give your consent, 'cause I'm so young. He's got no time to get away. I'm very fond of him, and he thinks I'm . . ." Sally hoisted her shoulders. She had spoken very deliberately.

"You said he was soppy."

Sally turned a cold eye upon her mother.

"You got too good a memory," she remarked. "What I've said to you . . . Well, I knew you'd worry about him, and think I was going to get into trouble, and . . .

Anyway, we're getting married this morning, and going for our honeymoon this afternoon."

"Where you going?"

"In the country. Penterby. It's on the river, near the sea. You get to the sea in no time. Ga—Bertram—Bert says it's lovely. Quiet, and . . . you know, you can get about."

"Married! I can't believe it!"

"I'll show you my certificate, when I get it. Don't you believe me?"

Mrs. Minto sat quite still upon the bed for a minute, her face intensely pale. She seemed unable to say anything more. Then, very slowly indeed, she recovered the power of motion, and rose wearily to her feet. She did not look at Sally, but kept her eyes away. She stood upright, and took two or three steps. But as she paused again her emotion became overwhelming, and she clutched feebly at the bedrail. With her head resting upon both thin arms she began to cry aloud—great turbulent sobs which shook her whole body.

"My baby! My baby!" she wailed noisily. "Oh, what shall I do! My baby!"

Sally's lips quivered. She tried to smile. Slowly she crept out of bed, and put her arms round her mother.

"Sh! Sh!" she whispered. "Ma! Ma! You're making me blubber, too. You old fool! It's not a funeral!"

Strange emotion shook Sally as well as her mother. But they were different. A thoughtful pucker came between her brows, and she had a smile that was almost contemptuous.

"Ma!" she repeated, as the sobs remained vehement. "Shut up, ma! Oh, what an old image! Talk about a noise! Anybody'd think it was *you* who was getting married!"

She had recovered her own nerve. She could not see

the future; but her head was cool, and she stared over her mother's shoulder at the sunlight bleaching the outer grime of the neighbouring roofs. In her thin nightgown she looked like a child, and her face was so impish that she seemed to regard her marriage as one more in a long series of good jokes. Her eyes were wide open, and her lips smiling.

BOOK THREE: CONSEQUENCES

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i

THE Merricks—Sally and Bertram—went for their honeymoon to Penterby, a little South of England town near the sea but not actually upon the coast. The honeymoon was to be a short one, the barest weekend, and so they could not go far from London; and for some reason Gaga could not stand the sea itself. Strong air made him ill, and even sight of rolling waves made him feel sick. Sally, still elated and not as yet very confident or assertive, immediately agreed when he suggested this country town; but she had no real notion of what was in store for her. She was all half-amused trepidation. The scuffled marriage-ceremony, after which the registrar's clerk hurried to call for her for the first time by her new name, was fun to her. It meant nothing: "I, Sarah, Margaret Minto, call on these present . . ." It was all a part of a game, a rather exciting game; and Gaga was no more to her after the ceremony than he had been before it. He was a tall agitated grey creature, very tremulous and muffled in his speech, and nothing like a husband. What *was* a husband? How did one feel towards a husband? All Sally knew was that her husband was a stranger. He was one man out of millions of men, no more and no less than the others. The thought that she was binding herself to him for life did not trouble her. It did not enter her head.

Nevertheless, she felt triumph at her wedding ring, and clutched Gaga's arm as they came out of the register office with their two casually-acquired witnesses. They

were instantly alone, and walking along the street together in the autumn sunshine, married and excited, but merely two strangers on their way to lunch. And yet that was not quite all, because when they were seated at lunch Sally felt the slightest sensation of flurry at Gaga's possessive stare. She returned it boldly, quite unembarrassed; but across her mind flitted a knowledge which came there of its own accord. He was a weak man, weak in his possessiveness as he had been weak in his stammering; and the possessiveness (which in a strong man might have excited her) gave Sally an uncomfortable sense that Gaga might bother her. She had never realised this. She saw in this instant that he would be jealous, exacting, amorous. She did not love him, and the amorousness of the unloved is a bore. Sally knew she could always deal with Gaga; but she did not want a profusion of excited caresses from him. It was this realisation that gave her a jerk of dismay. It was not that she shrank from him. It was that with her cold little brain she imagined him in a fever about her, fretful, tantalised by her coolness, rebuffed, sulky, ineffably tedious . . . As she knew all this her eyes darkened. It was all very well to play with Gaga; but he was now her husband, and that meant an association so constant that in future, so far from tempting him, she would forever be engaged in battles with his exasperating, petty claims to her person and her attention. He would not ever be able to understand her wish to be alone, or to be self-engrossed. Febrile himself, he would be dumfounded at her reserve, which he would take for hostility.

The knowledge came to Sally so unexpectedly that she did not respond to Gaga's unspoken appeals. The frown in her eyes deepened. All round her were the gilded mirrors of the Rezzonico, and the general noise and movement of a busy restaurant. Opposite was Gaga, smiling

with a sort of joy which made his long face appear to shine. She could tell that he was almost beside himself with excitement. And she was cool. There was no current of understanding between them. They had neither physical nor spiritual *rapport*. Slowly Sally's gaze took in all that was revealed in Gaga's face and his nervously extended hands. Slowly a little cruel smile played round her small mouth. She had married him. She was sure of him. But there was a price. He would be a nuisance, a futile nuisance to her. He would demand kisses, he would pry, would watch her, would fuss. He would be a lover with all the empty ardour of the neurotic man. Sally's heart sank. She did not want a restrained lover, because she was young and high-spirited; but this singular trembling possessiveness would soon be intolerable. He would be a nuisance. Again and again the threat pressed itself upon Sally's consciousness.

Men! That was what Sally thought. She had no deliberate mental process. All her intuitions were summarised in the one word. Men! Toby . . . Gaga! Gravely, she looked round the restaurant. There were fat men and thin men, dark and fair, ugly and good-looking and negligible. And as she looked at them in turn, puzzled, Sally shrugged her shoulders. She came back to Gaga. She gave him a false, alluring smile, secure in her power to excite him still further; but her gravity was constant. She had glimpsed for the first time a thing which she could not have known before marriage. It was that one married for different reasons, but that one had to endure the disadvantages accompanying any choice. She was not afraid, but she was ruffled. She was ruffled by that exulting possessiveness which shone from Gaga. Had she loved him, her joy might have been comparable with his. If she had loved him and he had seemed not to desire her, Sally's happiness would have been undermined.

But in her present coolness, the sense that Gaga was personally inescapable was enough to depress her. He would be a nuisance.

She found it so when they were in the taxicab on their way to Victoria. Her smallness made her unable to stem the torrent of his excited caresses. For a time she submitted to them, still entirely serious. Then a kind of petulant composure enabled her to chill him. Gaga laughed in a sort of giggle, holding Sally's hands, and looking adoringly into her eyes, and trying to kiss her. Instead of giving him kisses, instead of wishing him to kiss her, Sally found herself aware already of a slight repugnance. As she looked forward to spending days and nights with him her heart sank. She was not shocked. She was not afraid. She knew that there would come a time when, after boring her, Gaga's kisses would become troublesome. And it was too late now to withdraw. She was too deeply into her new scheme of life. But this feverish, insatiably amorous, weak Gaga would get on her nerves. So this was what marriage might be. Sally's jaw stiffened. Yes, if she allowed it to be so. But Sally was Sally. Kisses should presently be favours. Gaga should learn his place. A hardness showed. She pushed aside the clinging arms, and sat erect.

"No," cried Sally, sharply, at his convulsive motion of return. "Not now. We're . . . People looking at us. . . ."

She did not want to be hard. She did not want to grow hard and bitter. She had seen women who were both, and she disliked them. But with Gaga she would have to be hard. Otherwise he would bore her to desperation. So there was at this moment no longer any softness in Sally's heart towards Gaga. She resented him. As they pushed through the crowd at Victoria, Sally had a sudden impulse to run away. A shudder fled through her. A girl

with less resolute will, or perhaps of greater delicacy, would have made some movement. But Sally merely stood with her head lowered, and considered the position. It was not his love that she minded; it was his hysterical possessiveness, the sense that he would always be there and claiming convulsively those small incessant intimacies which accompany marriage. Sally could not put her perception into coherent terms; but she was assured of the fact. Gaga would want too much, and that not in an adorably masterful way, but with exacting and pertinacious excitement bred from his weakness and neurotic avidity. The domination of the weak man would be a tyranny, as it always is. Sally thought: "He'll be a nuisance. I shall want to do him in by the time we get back. Oh, Lor! You done for yourself, Sally, my gel! You come a mucker! Look at your husband! Look at him!" She could see Gaga in the distance, moving agitatedly about a porter and the guard, and tripping over luggage, and interrupting other eager passengers, and stretching his long arm over their shoulders in order to touch the guard. "That's your *husband,* that is! Man who's lost his head. Man they all love. Fancy living with it for fifty years! Oh, Lor! A whole lifetime. Three-hundred-and-sixty-five days in the year, too. All day, every day! Makes you start thinking!" And she watched Gaga speeding exultantly towards her.

"All right. We've got a first," he panted, quite out of breath. "To ourselves. I've tipped the guard. It's . . . it's all right. Come along. This way. Come along!"

"Oo!" cried Sally, with archness. "To ourselves! What a surprise! Strange!" And to herself, returning to her own sober thoughts: "If you did too much thinking you'd lose the use of your legs. And if girls thought a bit before they got marrying, they'd . . . Funny! I wonder what they *would* do!"

ii

What she would herself have done Sally had no time to consider; for they were hurried to their compartment, and were locked in by the obliging and amused guard. They then sat demurely upon opposite sides of the carriage until the train began to move. Every time anybody peered in at the window Sally, who had recovered her good spirits, began to laugh; and Gaga was full of consternation. But at last even that anxiety was removed, and in the afternoon sunlight the country began to glow under their eyes and race round in a sweeping circle with an intoxicating effect not to be appreciated by those who are staled for railway travelling. Sally allowed Gaga to embrace her; but she kept her face resolutely turned from him for a long time while she relished her new joy in rushing thus through the increasingly-beautiful districts which bordered the track. It was only when Gaga became expostulatory that she abandoned this pleasure and yielded to his tumultuous affection, with a listlessness and a sense of criticism which was new to her. Silly fool; why couldn't he sit still and be quiet! She belonged to herself, not to him. Almost, she thrust him away from her.

They reached Penterby by four o'clock in the afternoon, and were turned out upon the platform with their two light bags, like the stranded wanderers they were. And then they walked out into the roughly paved road leading through the town to higher land behind, and onward, along a road to which they turned their backs, and which wavered, past the railroad station, up an incline in the direction of the distant sea. Gaga carried both bags, and led the way, and Sally saw for the first time a wide street, and shops and houses quaintly built, and a church spire with houses below it, arranged in terraces,

all warm in the dying sun. It was still summer here, she thought, and the atmosphere was pleasant. The houses were not at all crowded, but stood up at the first glance as if they were proud of great age and their height above the road from the station.

"We going up there?" demanded Sally, pointing to the hill, and the houses erect upon it.

"No, darling . . . See . . . that . . . that . . . lamp."

Sally looked up at Gaga's face. Oh, if it had only been Toby! The blood suddenly rushed to her cheeks. Toby! She wanted Toby! As quickly, she was chilled by fear. What would Toby do? What would he try to do? Yes, well Toby didn't know yet that she was married. And she was married to Gaga, and she had done this thing with her eyes open. There was no going back. Marriage was a thing you could not repudiate. It was final. The blood flowed away from Sally's face. She was cool again in an instant. Her eyes were fixed upon the lamp which Gaga had indicated, and upon the ivy behind it. Upon a suspended board she read in gold the letters "RIVER HOTEL", and as she appreciated the meaning of this name Sally observed that the street went onward past the hotel over an unmistakable bridge.

"Is that the river?" she asked. "Is the hotel *on* the river? Where we stay?"

"Yes. You'll see . . . You'll like it." Gaga was entreating, now rather frightened by Sally's lack of response to his feverish endearments, already inclined to suspicion and sidelong glances of doubt.

"Sure I shall!" cried Sally, perfectly composed once more. "It's nice. Does the river go just there?"

Gaga became suddenly very enthusiastic. He motioned with the hand in which both small bags were carried. He began to walk at a quicker pace.

"You see the front of the hotel—all . . . all ivy. Well, at the end the wall goes . . . goes right down into the water. And there's a balcony . . . all . . . all covered with glass, on the first floor. Our room opens on this balcony. You can look right down into the river.

"Is it a nice river?"

He was rather hesitating in face of her sharp tone of inquiry.

"Well, er . . . Nice? It's . . . it's a tidal river. It flows up and down. In . . . in the summer things get carried . . . I mean, it's not . . . not very clean. It's mud."

"Oo." Sally's little nose wrinkled. "Does it smell? I mean, is it healthy?" But at this new question Gaga looked very perplexed and rather unhappy, so that she quickly abandoned her curiosity about the river, knowing that she would presently be able to satisfy it more effectively by personal observation. Without further speech they came abreast of the hotel, and turned in under the arched entrance. To the left of them was a door with the legend "COFFEE ROOM"; to the right another door above which hung a little sign "HOTEL." It was by this right-hand door that they entered, and it was here, by a glass enclosed bar, that they waited. Upon an extended shelf there was lying a newspaper which had come through the post for some departed visitor. Beyond the bar Sally noticed decanters and bottles and upturned glasses. Before her was another door, open, which revealed a table upon which glasses had left little circular stains. She was all curiosity. This must be the saloon. She gave a sharp mischievous hunching of the shoulders, and hugged Gaga's arm. Then, as a stout woman came out of another room, she grew sedate, and stood free from her husband in case they should be supposed to be upon their honeymoon.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Merrick."

She knew him, then. He was no stranger here.

"Mrs. Tennant . . . How . . . how d'you do? This . . . I've brought my wife with me this time," stammered Gaga proudly. "Sally, this is Mrs. Tennant."

"Pleased to meet you," announced the stout woman. Sally scrutinised her. She had been pretty, but had grown fat. She had puffs round her eyes, and swollen lips, and a catlike expression of geniality. Behind her agreeable smile there was suspicion of all mankind, suspicion and wariness, due to her constant need of self-control in the difficult business of managing noisy or cantankerous guests. Sally did not like her. "Tabby!" she thought at once. But immediately afterwards she knew that it would be worth while to make a friend of Mrs. Tennant. She gave her little friendly grin, and saw its effect. "That's that," reflected Sally. And it was so. Mrs. Tennant cordially led the way up to the first floor, talking of the weather, and of the number of visitors who were at present staying at the River Hotel.

"Does Mrs. Merrick play?" she asked. "Do you? We've got a very good piano in the drawing-room . . . I'm passionately fond of music myself. It's the sorrow of my life I can't play."

Sally grimaced. The drawing-room was glimpsed—a room with settees and big chairs and a strident carpet and antimacassars and small palms in pots. Large windows made it beautifully light. And as she took in these details Sally hurried on, and found herself in a narrow dun-coloured passage, where brown doors with numbers upon them indicated the bedrooms. It was into the second of these rooms that she was led, and in spite of the frowst she looked with eagerness at a further door and windows that opened upon the balcony of which Gaga had spoken. The windows were lace-curtained, but she

could see through the curtains to what seemed like a conservatory.

"You see the door opens on to the balcony," explained Mrs. Tennant, while Gaga put down the bags and wiped his hands with his handkerchief. "Looks right across the river. I'm afraid the tide's out now; but when it's up you see all sorts of things floating up and down."

"What sort of things?" demanded Sally, going to the glass sides of the building and peering down at the mud.

"Oh, *all* sorts. . . ." Mrs. Tennant was a little confused, but conversational. "That old building you see across there is . . . well, it used to be a granary; but nobody's used it for a long time. There's a dinghy in the mud over there. It's Mr. Scuffle's . . ."

Dinghy! Instantly Sally's mind jerked back to a day she had spent with Toby, when he had teased her about her ignorance of boats. Toby! So that was a dinghy! Just like any other boat.

The balcony was empty; but trays still lay upon two of the light iron tables, and a newspaper had been tossed upon the matted floor. All the chairs were of wicker, and in them lay little hard cushions covered with dirtied cretonne. Through the long glass side one could see the slowly-flowing river (for the tide was about to turn), and the already dimming sky, and the houses upon the rising ground that lay beyond the farther bank, and the bridge upon which people were walking. Sally looked up and down the momentarily sinister river. She was afraid of water, afraid of its secrecy and its current; and she turned away from her contemplation with a sense of chill.

"I'm cold," she said, brightly. "Bertram . . . Could we have some tea, Mrs. Tennant?"

"Certainly. You'd like a wash? I'll get the tea at once. . . ."

Back in the room, Sally was immediately again embraced. She did not now trouble about Gaga; she was glad of his arms around her, and his breast upon which she could lay her head. Married . . . river . . . married . . . river . . . ran her thoughts. And she turned away from Gaga to the washstand, and poured cold water from the ewer into the basin.

"Let me alone . . ." she laughingly said. "Ee . . . get away . . . I'm going to wash."

And when the water touched her face Sally was alert once more, cleansed and freshened. With tea before her she could face even marriage and that drearily-flowing river and the hideous mud, so thick and so oozily sinister.

iii

On the following day Sally, dogged everywhere by Gaga, was perfectly aware of her contempt for him. Twenty-four hours had been enough to show her the exacting and irritating characteristics of her new husband. Did she stir, he looked up; his hand was ever ready for her hand; those chocolate eyes were eternally suffused with a love that moved Sally to impatience. He did not even amuse her by his calf-like pursuit. All that was ruthless in her rose up and sneered at his weakness and his timid assurance, which had the same effect as one of those horrible streamers of cobweb that catch the face as one walks unwarily along a dusky lane. Only her native resoluteness enabled her to show Gaga a false patience. Only her insensitiveness made his constant caress endurable. Sally blinked sometimes at his grabbing sentimentality; but she already began to slip neatly aside and avoid his carefully-planned contacts. She was not yet hard or perverse.

And while Gaga lay down in the afternoon, as she

found he was in the habit of doing, in order that his physical strength might last through the day, Sally found the empty drawing-room and with often-strained ears began the difficult task which she had set herself. Below her was the thick, powerful current of the now sinking river, laden with refuse which flowed backwards and forwards past the hotel; and upon the windows and casual brightnesses of the tall houses on the hill across the river she could see the crystal sparkling of reflected sunshine. She had a feeling that all about Penterby was open green country, sometimes flat, but always in the distance crowned and adorned with hills; and she knew the brown of the river and the mud, and the green slime which decorated the wall opposite. It was unforgettable. She would always think of it. And her task was the writing of a letter to Toby. She had planned to write to him upon this day—the first free day of her married life; and she was bent upon keeping to her plan. He must be told at once, and yet as she held the pen above a sheet of plain paper she was stunned by the extraordinary difficulty of the composition. Only then, for the first time, did she grasp the definiteness of the step she had taken. She would never see Toby again. Never? Never—never—never. Sally's eyes filled with tears. A thick, painful sob forced its way through her. Never.

She began to write. She put no address, but only, in her plain handwriting, still that of a schoolgirl, the words "My dear." It was at this point that Sally began to discard all the phrases which she had earlier composed in her head. She considered that if she were never to see Toby again it did not matter what he thought of her. The bald announcement would do very well. It was best, and easiest, and safest. And then she knew again that she was afraid of Toby, and of what he might do. She was a true woman in being unable to face a conclusion.

She could not imagine that she would never see him again. It was incredible. So incapable was she of realising the fact of a complete break that she thought herself possessed by an instinct that they must meet and continue as before. Sally was much more afraid that he would kill her. It was the reason why she was putting no address at the head of the letter. He must not find her with Gaga. She wrote at last.

"My dear. I have been a bad wicked girl and married another man. Do not try to find me. I shall be all right. Find some other girl, and be happy with her. I shall never be happy without you. My husband is very kind and good. Don't forget me."

At the end of this letter she put no signature, but a single cross to indicate a kiss. Then she addressed an envelope, stamped it, slipped down the stairs and along to the post office. By the time Toby got the letter she and Gaga would no longer be there; and he would not be able to find her afterwards. London was so big. She was afraid of him, and yet she longed to see him again. Five minutes later she was back in the drawing-room, seated at the piano, and singing softly in her clear voice the song that had first so greatly charmed Gaga.

"'Your heart mine, and mine in your keeping,
List while I sing to you love's tender song.'"

As she sang, Sally looked up and at the doorway. There, adoringly, stood Gaga, all his love making a radiance in his face which she had not previously seen so distinctly. He came slowly towards her, and as she continued her song he kissed the back of her neck where the hair was brushed up in the first soft incalculable wave.

Sally for the first time shrank a little; but she pursued her song unhesitatingly, so schooled was she in her determination that the price she was paying was to be borne.

> "'When you and I go down the love path together,
> Stars shall be shining and the night so fair.'"

"We'll go . . . go walking in the moonlight to-night . . . shall we?" whispered Gaga. Sally nodded, making her voice quaver by the motion. Gaga could not see her face; but Sally knew that even if he had done so he would have been quite unable to read her thoughts, which were dry and inflexible. He remained by her side until she had finished the song, and then fiercely pressed her head back until he was able by stooping to kiss her lips from above. His hand was under her chin. He kissed her many times, oppressively—little ravenous pecks that were febrile rather than loving; and assertive of his new proprietorship. His kisses left Sally unmoved and slightly frowning. She was surprised at Gaga's simplicity in imagining that any girl valued or could possibly value such ceaseless demonstrative action, such ugly hard little parrot-like caresseses.

"Only a soppy kid would," she thought. "She'd like it, I suppose. Think quantity meant love. It doesn't. Like a beak. Silly fool!" And aloud she said quite firmly: "There, that's enough. Shan't have any face left, at this rate. I shall come out in spots. What's the time?"

To soften her words she held and pressed his hand; but only for an instant. Then she rose abruptly from the piano and walked over to the window. With his arm immediately at her waist Gaga followed, like a long, abject greyhound.

"The tide's out," he said, indicating the sun illumined mud by the opposite wall.

"Ugh!" shuddered Sally. "Fancy getting your feet in that stuff! You'd never get out . . . Gives me the horrors, it does!" She leaned back into his arms.

iv

They left Penterby by a very early train on the Monday morning, and while Gaga took the two bags to an hotel where the Merricks were to stay for the present Sally went direct to Madame Gala's. She had obtained special permission to be an hour late in the morning, and so she entered the workroom without confusion. It was the same as it had always been—the long benches, and the girls, and Miss Summers sitting apart, as plump and feline as ever. There was, of course, curiosity about Sally. Few of the girls supposed that she had been away with a girl friend, which had been the story; and all looked at her with a knowing suspicion. Only Miss Summers was completely trusting. Sally had slipped off her wedding-ring, and it lay in her purse. She took in the whole scene as she entered, and measured the assumptions of the girls with cool indifference. But she would have done that in any case; for Sally had nothing to learn about workgirls and their thoughts and interpretations, and she had also none of the false self-consciousness which makes wrong-doers imagine that their actions have been providentially revealed to all observers. Had she and Gaga arrived together the case would have been different; but nothing had occurred to make the girls suppose that there was any relation between them, and Sally was perfectly safe from that most dangerous of all recognitions. She was still, to the girls, Sally Minto; and to some of them still the white-faced cocket of Rose Anstey's jealous outburst. Sally looked boldly at Rose as she sat industriously working. Then, with greater stealth, at

Miss Summers. That plump face had a solemnly preoccupied expression that gave Sally a faint start of doubt. Immediately, however, she knew that Miss Summers must be worried, not upon Sally's account, but on account of some message respecting Madam which had been received earlier in the morning. This made her seize an excuse to approach Miss Summers.

"How's Madam?" she whispered, surreptitiously.

Miss Summers shook her head with foreboding.

"Still the same. No better; no worse. Sally, I'm *afraid.*"

Sally looked down at Miss Summers. How strangely their relation had been altered by this weekend's doings! Wherever Sally glanced she knew that what she saw was now potentially her own. By the simple act of marrying Gaga she had become, as it were, mistress of the place. And she knew it. She knew it plainly and without swollen conceitedness. Not yet was her power unquestionable; but it was none the less genuine. Even Miss Summers . . .

"I hope she gets better," said Sally.

Miss Summers shot a quick glance upwards. She started, and a faint redness came into her plump cheeks. The tip of her nose was irritated, and she rubbed it with her knuckle.

"Oh, I do *hope* so," breathed Miss Summers. "It would be awful—awful for all of us—if she didn't. You see . . ."

"She'll have to die some time," remarked Sally.

"But now!" The head was shaken afresh. Miss Summers gave a heavy sigh. She had no such youthful confidence as Sally's. She was a born follower, a born sheep; and with Madam removed she could see nothing ahead but disaster to the business. Sally had a little difficulty in keeping back her smile. She thought of this poor old

pussycat in fear of her life, and her lip slightly curled at the knowledge that she alone had superior knowledge of the situation. Already Sally was casting round for channels in which her new power might be used. She wanted opportunity. It was both a chagrin and a secret relief to her that Madam could not yet be told of the marriage. If she knew it, and disapproved, as Sally knew that she must do, Madam could at any moment annul Sally's hopes of taking a leading part in the business. She could alter her will. Therefore, if she lived, she must be kept ignorant. It would be a trouble. And yet in spite of her assurance Sally was still suspicious of her own ability to master every detail in time to carry on the whole establishment without a great lapse into momentary failure. She planned as a middle-aged woman. At eighteen her plans were profound. But instinctively, and in spite of colossal conceit, she understood that eighteen was not an age at which control can successfully be taken of a large business. Therefore she was fighting against unacknowledged fear.

During that day she hardly saw Gaga at all. He was at home with his mother, and did not come to business until the afternoon. Only in the evening did she creep into his room and submit to his endearments. She then left, and went to the hotel at which for the present they were to stay; and here, in the little sitting-room attached to their bedroom, she was for the first time able to be alone for half-an-hour with her post-nuptial reflections. They were not all pleasant, and they called for the exercise of her natural resoluteness. She had comfort, and the knowledge that she need never again trouble about food and clothing. But she also knew that a husband is a different sort of person from a lover. He seemed to her to be a sort of omnipresent nuisance. Her trouble was that thoughts and ambitions were in conflict with Gaga's

amorousness. He could never understand her. He could understand her no better than Toby, and as she had no use for him otherwise than as the instrument of her ambition, she was already, within two days of marriage, bored with him. Sally awaited Gaga's arrival with calm unwillingness. She did not realise how rapid would be her instinctive progress to repugnance; but she had no illusions about her marriage.

At last Gaga arrived, his own eagerness unabated, but he was still shaken by the fact that his mother was seriously ill. With Sally in his arms he whispered or murmured alternately professions of love and anxiety. She was all the time secretly astonished at his devotion to Madam, because it corresponded to nothing in her own nature; but she comforted Gaga because it was her impulse to do so. She did not dislike him in this mood. She felt pity for him. It was only for his tremulous persistency in caress that Sally felt contempt. Gradually she began to be able to divert his mind to other matters—to their own future, and the flat they were to take and to furnish; and to the plans they must make for a slow change of her position in the business. Already Sally was obtaining a grasp of the details, but she could go little further until her access to the books and accounts was free. She could do nothing until some scheme had been made. So the two sat together after dinner and discussed what they were to do, and where they were to live, and how the rooms of the flat were to be furnished. It was all, upon Sally's side, practical and clear; and for Gaga a wonderful revelation of Sally's wisdom. He became more and more infatuated, as Sally became more and more cool. And they talked the whole evening through, without realising that with each moment Sally's dominion was more firmly established.

It was only towards the end of the evening that Gaga,

unhinged by excitement, became desperately pale, and confessed to a headache. He found his customary drugs, and took them. But to Sally this headache was a new and emphatic indication of Gaga's troublesome temperament. Ugliness and squalor she knew; but sickliness was new to her. In face of a groaning and prostrate man, she turned away. Her heart sank a little. Then, with a shrug, she turned to the advertisements of flats to let in London which she found in various newspapers; and made notes of the addresses of house agents. This occupation she continued until Gaga called almost fretfully from the next room, when she turned off the electric light and joined him. An hour later, while Gaga still lay staring into the darkness, Sally was fast asleep. She had no dreams. For the present she was occupied with facts alone; and she did not suspect that she was unhappy, because she had been absorbing too many details to be able to reflect upon the sinking of her heart and its meaning.

V

The next evening Sally went to see her mother. Her first object was to get Mrs. Minto away from the room in which they had lived; because it was essential that if Toby came back, as she believed he could not do for some days, he should be unable to trace Sally or her mother. It was for fear of Toby that the removal was to be made. Once get Mrs. Minto away, to some other part of North London, and Toby might seek news of Sally in vain. Only if he came and waited outside Madam's would he be able to find her; and in that case she could still baulk him, as she was going to stay late every evening for the future in order to work with Gaga. But first of all, Sally must arrange to get her mother out of the old house. She would not want to go. She must go. She would pretend

that she could keep herself. She would show the stubborn pride of many old people of the working class, who will work until they kill themselves rather than accept charitable doles. Very well, Sally knew that Mrs. Minto could not keep herself; and she knew also that these same old people have no similar delicacy in taking from their children's earnings. She was going to explain that she was still working, and that what Mrs. Minto would receive came from Sally herself, and not from Sally's husband. And she would herself find a room for her mother in Stoke Newington, a suburb which is farther from Holloway than many more distant places for the reason that no dweller in Holloway has any curiosity about Stoke Newington or any impulse to go there as an adventure.

Sally found Mrs. Minto in a familiar attitude, stooping over a very small fire; but as she ran up the stairs very softly, with a nervous dread of Toby, she had no conception of the welcome which awaited her. She opened the door and went into the dingy room, and stood smiling; and to her great surprise she saw her mother rise almost wildly and come towards her. Two thin arms pressed and fondled her, and a thin old cheek was pressed hard against her own. To herself Mrs. Minto was ejaculating in a shivering way: "My baby, my baby!" Only then did Sally understand how much the separation had meant to her mother. She herself had never once thought of that lonely figure at home.

"Poor old thing!" Sally found herself saying. "Was she lonely then?" She patted her mother's bony shoulders, and hugged her, affected by this involuntary betrayal of love. Mrs. Minto had never been demonstrative. "I wish I'd brought you something, now. A present. I never thought of it."

"Is it all right? Are you happy, my dearie?" demanded Mrs. Minto, with a searching glance.

"I knew what I was doing, ma," proclaimed Sally. "There's not much I don't know."

It was an evasion; a confession of something quite other than the happiness about which she had been asked.

"Ah, that's what I was afraid of . . ." breathed her mother. "That's what young people always think. You don't know nothing at all, Sally."

"I know more'n you do!" It was a defiance.

"You think you do. Why, you're only a baby. . . ." Mrs. Minto shook her head several times, with lugubrious effect. But her last words had been full of a smothered affection, more truly precious than a hundred of Gaga's kisses or a dozen of Toby's animal hugs.

"In your days I should have been." Sally withdrew herself, and led her mother back to her chair. "Not know! Why, the girls know a lot more now than they used to when *you* was a girl. No more timid little creatures."

"They only *think* they know more," declared Mrs. Minto, trembling. "And it takes 'em longer to find out they don't know nothing at all. It takes a lot of time to get to know. You're in too much of a hurry, my gel. You don't know nothing. Nothing whatever, for all your talk of it. I been thinking about it all these days—frantic, I've been."

"All these *years*!" jeered Sally. "Look here, ma. . . . Here's my marriage license!" And as she spoke she waved the folded paper before her mother's eyes in such a way that it fell open and showed the official entries. Even as she did this so lightly, Sally was able to catch the sharply hidden expression of relief which crossed Mrs. Minto's face at the reassurance. She made no pretence of misunderstanding. "Say I don't know anything?" she demanded. "Think I don't know enough for that? Silly old fool? What did I tell you? There's about

twenty million things I know that you don't know. And never *will* know, what's more. Wake up! I tell you one thing, ma. The people who *don't* know think a lot worse than the people who do. They fancy more. See? It's a little way they got. All goes on inside their heads, and shakes about. People like me haven't got time to think a lot of muck. We *do* things . . . and do them thorough."

Mrs. Minto, reproved, sank into contemplation.

"Well, I don't know, Sally," she went on, after a pause. "You talk a lot. I'd rather think than talk. You say he's rich. Sometimes girls get left."

"Not me, though," Sally assured her. "Soppy ones do. I'm not soppy. And I'll tell you what. I'm going to get you out of this place."

"I ain't going to live with you and him!" declared Mrs. Minto in alarm. "I wouldn't!"

"No. You're going to live somewhere else. I want you to get away from here. You're going to have two decent rooms . . . in Stoke Newington. Real paper on the walls, and a carpet, and new mattress that isn't like two horse troughs."

"I won't take nothing from him."

"No. From me. Out of my wages."

"You ain't going to have . . . Don't be silly. I'm well off where I am."

"I'm going to keep on at Madam's. I'm going to have plenty money. And you're going to move. Got it? I'll see about it to-morrow night, get you in Thursday or Friday. Won't take an hour to settle you in. Then you'll be comfortable."

"I'm very well as I am," said Mrs. Minto, obstinately. "I can keep myself. I'm not going to sponge on you. Not likely."

"You'll move Thursday or Friday, I tell you."

It was final. The poor thin little old woman had no fight in her. She looked up at Sally, and her face was the anxious face of a monkey, or of a sick beast that is being tended. Now that she had been comforted about Sally she had nothing left to say. She made a last feeble effort.

"I don't want to move. Mrs. Roberson . . ."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"My 'ead!"

"Your head'll get better if you keep quiet and have real coal and a bath or two." Sally was imperious, and enjoyingly so. Her spirits had risen. She was a general. She looked down protectingly at her mother, and a ghost of ancient love rose breathing in her heart. "Silly old thing!" she murmured, with a touch of softness; and knelt suddenly. "Got to look after you a bit," she added. "It's you who's the baby now. What a lot of kids people are! Makes me feel a hundred—and over—when I see what fools they are. I'm sorry for you, and that's the truth. You and Miss Summers and Gaga."

"Who's Gaga?"

"He's Mr. Sally Minto," said Sally with mystic insolence. "That's who Gaga is. He calls himself my husband, but he's no more my husband than you are, ma. And never will be. But oh, Lor! He's going to be the worry of my life! Ma, did Pa chase you all over the place when you was married? I mean, chase you all about trying to kiss you and fuss you?"

"No, dear," said Mrs. Minto. "He was drunk. He didn't know what he was doing."

"Hn." Sally grunted. Then she stood up again. "I'm going now," she announced. "I'm going back to Gaga. He's ill. I expect he's being sick."

And before her mother could make startled enquiries, Sally had kissed her and gone to the door. She ran in

high spirits down the stairs and out of the front door, not laughing, but in a curious way moved by this conversation and the strange turn which it had taken. She slammed the door after her, and met with a sudden squall of wind. And as she went away from the house she was conscious of a feeling of relief. She had escaped from it, and her heart was beating rather fast. All the time, under her speech and her thoughts, she had unconsciously been listening for Toby's step upon the stair. Even now, she knew that her shoulders were contracted with apprehensiveness.

She hurried along in the direction of Holloway Road, still flinching, with her nerves uncommonly strained. It was such an odd feeling that she had in thus revisiting her ugly old home. She had noticed it all afresh—the tired linoleum, and the oil stove and the tiny fire made from coal blocks, and the stupid old bed and the browned wallpaper—and she felt that it all belonged to a time when she had been a different girl altogether. She had never before been away from home, without her mother, for so long. She had never once been away from this room for a night, until her marriage. And to come thus into the dark street, in a wind, with the door slamming behind her, took Sally's memories uncontrollably back to the days which followed their first arrival, the days when she had met Toby and talked to him and walked with him about the streets. She recalled her visit to Mrs. Perce, and the sight of that grim figure relentlessly waiting for her outside the Stores; and the struggle with Toby, and her resultant happiness; and the night when he had first come to the room while her mother lay in the hospital. Heigho! She had been young in those days; now she felt an old woman, with all the sense of ageless age which the young feel after a transition from one kind of life to another. She was in a sense disillusioned. She had taken her step,

and cut the link that bound her to this neighbourhood and the starveling room. She had cut the link that bound her to Toby. And he was now swiftly back in her consciousness, in her heart; so that she knew she would never forget him because he was the first man she had loved, and thus forever her idea of a lover. So strong was her emotion that she felt a strange little dryness in her throat and her burning eyes, and fancied she heard his voice. It was as though two years had been taken away, as though she once again—as she done two years ago—longed and feared to meet Toby.

As Sally, with her head bent and her thoughts active, pressed onward, she heard the clanging bell of a passing tramcar, and saw its brilliant lights rush by along the Holloway Road. A cart rattled on the rough stones of the road, and the wind blew the leaves of the bushes in the gardens she passed. And as she shivered a little at the wind's onset she again imagined that she heard Toby's voice, and inevitably turned in the direction from which the sound had appeared to reach her. Everything was quite dark; but there was a blackness just behind her that was like the figure of a man. It took shape; it came nearer and nearer. Sally's heart stopped beating, and she shrank back against the railing of one of the houses. She felt a deadly sickness upon her, a dreadful horror.

"Sally!"

It *was* Toby. He was abreast, inescapable. He loomed over her like a figure of vengeance. Her heart was like water. She was hysterically afraid.

vi

"Hallo, Sally!" Toby was by her side, and his arms round her, and his kisses on her cheek. "Why, aren't you going to kiss me?"

Sally's eyes opened wide at his tone of innocent surprise. She suffered him to kiss her lips. Toby had not received her letter! He was on leave, and . . . She gasped. An indescribable relief caused her to rest limply and unprotestingly in his arms. Once again they were engulfed in merciful darkness, hidden from each other and from anybody who might happen to pass. She could not think at all; but she was thankful at this reprieve. Not yet would he kill her. And as they stood embraced she was suddenly happy, with a passion that astonished her. Toby—Toby, her love; and she herself in his arms again, as she had never thought to be. A strange laugh, low and tender, came from her lips. Her cheek was gently rubbed against his, and her body quite relaxed. Every one of Sally's difficulties suffered an oblivion; they were all dispersed in the extraordinary mist of sensation which enwrapped her.

"I *was* surprised," she murmured, kissing him with all her heart. "Didn't expect to see you. Funny to see you . . . so *funny* . . . and when I was thinking of you. I must have known you were coming."

"I just got in," Toby said. "I say, where you going, Sal?"

Sally flinched again. Immediately she was conscious of terror.

"Stoke Newington," she cried; in a flash. What was she to do? What *was* she to do? She was desperate. Fear was strong; but love was stronger. It was not only now that she did not dare to tell him the truth in case he killed her; much more than that was her understanding of the fact that she could not bear to lose him. Such a gust of thankfulness had shaken Sally when she knew that Toby had not received her letter that she was brimming now with joy. It was impossible to lose her rapture at the moment of its full glory. She *could* not tell him.

"Stoke Newington? Whatever for? Here, wait till I've had some grub. . . . No, I'll come with you now. Get some grub later. Have you got to go there now?"

"You musn't come, Toby."

"Why not?" He was instantly suspicious. His grip tightened, and he forced her to look at him.

"Didn't you get my letter?"

"When? Now? I've had no letter. What you going to Stoke Newington for? No, I want to know. You going to meet another chap? I believe you are, you little devil! By Christ! If you . . . I *will* come!" Toby was now fiercely suspicious. She could tell from his ferocious grip, and the urgency of his tone. "If you're playing that game, I'll kill you. By Christ, I will!"

"I'm not. I'm not," cried Sally. "You're hurting me, Toby!"

"You swear it?" He relaxed his hold, which was strangling her. In the darkness he again strove to see her expression and judge for himself of her honesty.

"I'm not going to see anybody. I swear I'm not."

"Why did you ask if I'd had your letter? What you bin writing to me?"

"Oo, a lot of lies . . ." breathed Sally. "Silly talk and rubbish. That's all it was."

"What about?" He was still intense. Sally could hardly breathe, and her courage was fading. They were so much in the darkness that they could not be seen, and she was entirely dominated by Toby's physical strength. Within his grasp she was helpless, and not all her dartingly-imagined expedients would be enough to secure her escape. Hastily she improvised a story.

"Well, I'm not living with ma any longer. I gone out to live in," she lied.

"Stoke Newington?"

"No."

"Lost your job?"

"No."

He was baffled! but he knew that something was amiss. Sally could feel him drawing deep breaths. In the shadow she could imagine that his jaw was firmly set. It was strange to feel so happy in his arms, so afraid of death, so frustrate in the composition of any tale by which she could free herself and thus gain time to make some fresh plan. Sally had never been in a comparable quandary.

"Where you living?" he next demanded.

"Don't be rough. You're hurting. Well, I'm living . . . I forget the address. Only went there last night. I'm with a friend."

"What sort of a friend? A girl? What's her name?"

"Miss Summers."

Toby considered. He had heard that name, Sally knew, and must remember it. She felt that at last she had stumbled upon something which would seem to him probable enough to allay immediate suspicion.

"She's your forewoman or something, isn't she?" he demanded.

"Yes. She's very kind. She's ever so nice." Sally prayed that he might believe her. There was a long pause of doubt, during which hysteria, rising, nearly provoked a frantic struggle for freedom and flight. But she remembered a former occasion, and her knees were weak at the foreknowledge of failure. He would not be merciful. She feared him and adored him.

"Well," Toby said at last, in a grumble; "when do I see you? Eh?" Thank God, his voice had changed. He had spoken slowly and in acceptance of the tale. Sally conquered a sob that would have betrayed her. Toby had been tricked. There was still a chance that she might be able to manage him for the present.

Sally thought for a moment, but in a distracted blur. All her plans, made upon the assumption that he would be at sea for at least a week longer, had miscarried. There was now no sense in moving her mother hurriedly and secretly. Toby, in the room above, would be aware of everything. She must arrange this differently. It would need a careful scheme. When would Toby receive his letter? Probably it would not be forwarded at all, but would be kept at the offices of the shipping company. That was what had happened once or twice before. He would be at home a week. She had a week. How tired she was! She must get away now, and have a chance to think; but she must see Toby again. She *must*.

"To-morrow," Sally gasped. "To-morrow night. Eight o'clock. Marble Arch. Eight o'clock, or a bit after. I might be kept a little late."

To her inexpressable thankfulness, Toby rather grumblingly agreed.

"We'll go to the pictures," he said. "There's a picture house there."

"Wherever you like. Toby, I *must* go."

They kissed long and passionately; and when Sally was alone, sitting in the tramcar on its way to Holborn, she found that she was trembling from head to foot. She was in consternation, and prevented from crying only by the steadily inquisitive stare of a stout woman opposite. Sally had never been so afraid, so distraught. She had never been in such a bewildering and terrifying difficulty. She was only half conscious.

vii

And when she reached the hotel their sitting-room was in darkness. Gaga had evidently been home, for the evening paper had been thrown upon the floor, and his

hat and coat were upon one of the chairs. Sally remembered what she had told her mother, and went quickly to the bedroom door. It was true. Gaga lay groaning in bed, and there was a faint smell of sickness in the air. Sally instinctively recoiled, and went back into the sitting-room. Her hands came together and jerked in a gesture of despair. Everything was against her. The white face was whiter; the mischievous eyes were sombre. She was a lonely and frightened child without any support in her life. She was too young, in spite of her vivacity, to endure such trials unbroken; and in this situation she was overwhelmed.

With her hands to her mouth, Sally stumbled to the hearthrug, and bowed her head against the arm of a chair. Painful sobs shook her body.

"Oh, I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!" she wailed.

In that moment of lost hope she was faced only with the impossibility of dealing with all her trials. She had been over-excited, and she was desperate. Everything had gone wrong. She was thus early face to face with the consequences of her own blithe and over-confident actions; and the consequences threatened disaster. Death would really at this moment have seemed better than the effort she must make to grapple with her problems. It would have been so much easier, and she was without courage. Afraid lest her sobs might arouse Gaga and bring him groaning to her side, she stifled them. But they made her body heave for a long time, until at last with tear-filled eyes she stared at the fire, and knew that the fit was over.

What was Sally to do? There was the fatal letter already waiting somewhere for Toby, or on its way to him. The thought of it made her body feel as though it were covered with prickles. She could not keep still, but started

to her feet and took several paces, her hand to her cheek, as she remained deep in disturbed thought. If she saw Toby the next night, and was again afraid to tell him of her marriage, what would become of her? Sooner or later he was bound to know. The letter would tell him. Oh, if only she had not written that letter! She would have had time, and time was what she needed—time to remove her mother, to cover her own tracks. And yet she knew now that she could not give Toby up. And yet to give up her ambitions was now a proposition equally impossible. She could not. She would not. She wanted everything. She wanted Toby; but she wanted her opportunity with the business. If Toby would only . . . what? She could not bear the idea of his marrying another girl. She wanted him for herself. But if he would only accept the situation—for the present. If he would keep quiet. He would not. She could not control him, because he was another human being, with desires and impulses as insistent as her own.

Her mind came round to another position. If she had not married Gaga—if she had kept on playing with him, tantalising him, until she had been indispensable! No; that was impossible. Wretched creature though she felt him at this moment to be, Gaga also was a human being. Sally was in conflict with the world, because the world opposes to the wilfulness of the individual a steady pressure that is without mercy because it is without considerateness. Nothing is more selfish than the individual, except the mass of individuals, which has greater power. Again, in her torment, Sally longed for death. Then, quickly tangential, she returned to Toby and their coming meeting. If she did not tell him, but let him find her letter—she would have lost him. He would be savagely angry. He would infallibly kill her, because she would have deserved his vengeful hatred.

A moan reached Sally's ears. Her name was called. Gaga must have seen from his bed the light in the next room. She hesitated, repugnance and cruelty struggling in her mind with the knowledge that she must submit to her burden. Then she again turned to the bedroom, fighting down her distaste, her horror of sickness and illness, of invalidism, of Gaga in particular. She saw his grey face all pointed and sunken in the electric light, and took in the general bareness of the bedroom, with its plain iron bedstead and cream coloured crockery and worn carpet and walls of a cold pale blue.

"Sally," groaned Gaga. "I've been waiting for you."

"You ill?" she asked, perfunctorily. "Is your head bad?"

"Dreadful! How long you've been." Gaga's voice was feeble. He spoke with difficulty. His hand was reached out for hers. With an effort Sally took it, and bent and kissed Gaga's temple. He looked ghastly, and his face was moist with perspiration. Had Gaga seen the aversion in Sally's eyes he would have released her in horror; but he was self-engrossed. He had been longing for her, and as Sally sat on the edge of the bed smoothing the hair back from his brow he nestled closer to her, appeased by the contact, and genuinely comforted by her presence. His eyes closed. He made no attempt to speak.

So they remained for several moments. Then Sally tried to move, and he resisted her movement with a clinging protest.

"I'm just going to tidy up a bit," she said. "Then I'm coming to bed."

"I wish you'd get me something . . . Some Bovril . . . or . . . something." Gaga was like a wasted child, not fractious, but fretful and wanting to be petted. Sally shuddered as she took steps to gratify him; and was glad to have some occupation that carried her out

of the room and gave her something to do. She was momentarily diverted from thought of Toby; but she had a new desire to be away from the hotel, and in some house or flat which she could control by herself. It would be so much easier. It would . . .

When she was in bed she was prevented from sleeping by her now recurring diffculties. She was absolutely unable to make a plan for Toby. She was disgusted with Gaga and his sickness. She was afraid and rebellious and exasperated. And as she lay there she felt Gaga moving, and heard his faint groaning, and shook with a frenzy that was a thousand times more than irritation at the tangle in which she was placed. Like all young people, she imperiously demanded a fresh start—to cut all this mess away, and begin again as though nothing at all had happened. She tried to repudiate her own actions. It was no good. She could not cancel them. What she had done was done, and the consequences were inexorable. It was with consequences alone that she had to deal. Stifled screams rose within her. She turned frantically from side to side.

"Sally!" peevishly protested Gaga. "I can't get . . . get to sleep if you fidget like that. You're keeping me . . . awake. Disturbing me."

"Am I?" cried Sally, with suppressed anger steeling her voice. "I can't get to sleep either. It's deadly!"

"But you're . . . fidgetting."

"Oh . . . I thought I was lying quite still!" she exclaimed, with irony. A bitter laugh was checked upon her lips.

There was a silence, and Sally tried to sleep. It was of no use. With a deep sigh that was almost a passionate exclamation, she once again gave way to her uncontrollable restlessness.

"Sally!" came the grizzling voice of Gaga.

"What?" she shouted, past all self-restraint.

"You're fidgetting!"

"Well! Who wouldn't? You groaning—groaning—groaning. Enough to make anybody fidget. Why, you're making me sick! Why can't you look after yourself? . . . What's the use of eating things that make you ill?"

"I didn't," groaned Gaga. "I only want to get to sleep."

"O—oh!" It was a savage, inhuman sound of horror and despair. Sally, unendurably exasperated, slipped out of bed, and put on a skirt and coat. Then she went into the sitting-room, made up the fire, and curled herself up in one of the armchairs. A thin voice followed her.

"Sally!" It was a direct call to hysteria. "Sally . . . Sally . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" cried Sally. "I can't stand it. I can't stand it."

"My dearest . . ."

She ignored Gaga; but she could not sleep. Although he called no more, she heard him still occasionally making some plaintive sound, while she continued to lie curled in the chair until her limbs were cramped. Long she pondered upon her fate and her situation; and the morning found her still irresolute, filled with distaste for Gaga, and fear of Toby, and a general loathing of the difficulties which she and they had jointly created. She was unhappy in a way that she had never previously known, helplessly indignant, and all the time argumentative and explanatory to herself because she knew that for all that was now threatening her she alone was at heart to blame. But this did not prevent Sally from disliking Gaga as she had not hitherto disliked him; for Gaga was the person whom she had most injured, and the person who now stood in the way of complete liberty. It was as yet only an hysterical exasperation due to her search for

some scapegoat; but his sickness and his peevish complaints of her restlessness had added to Sally's feeling an ingredient of distaste which she could not overcome.

viii

In the morning, when they met, Gaga was sulkily distant; and Sally sat opposite to him at their chilly breakfast with a puckered brow and a curled lip. It was not hatred that fired her, but repugnance. If Gaga had made any motion towards an embrace she would wildly have pushed him from her. She could not have borne his touch. She was even thankful that he was so silent. In this estrangement she found momentary relief. And all the time, hammering in her head, was the one thought—Toby, Toby. What was she to do with Toby? As she left Gaga at breakfast she was still on the borders of hysteria. She was suffering so much from the trials of the night that she was hardly in her senses.

The workroom, with its routine and the need for hiding her feelings, gave her more relief. She could at least take some pains to sew accurately, to watch the other girls, and to notice how Miss Summers started at the slightest noise. Miss Summers, Sally knew, was worrying about Madam and Madam's health. By now Gaga would be on his way to his mother's home, equally concerned. Only Sally was indifferent to Madam's health. She had no interest in it. Where she would, but for Toby, have followed every report with curiosity, she was now more than callous. Madam was the least of her dilemmas. Sally's eyes closed; slowly she rocked to and fro, forgetting even the girls, and ignoring her work altogether. Toby. Her heart contracted with fear. Toby.

And yet the day wore on, and she came to no conclu-

sion. Late in the afternoon there came a telephone message. Gaga was on the line, asking for Sally. A thrill went round the workroom. Gaga—Sally! All the girls looked at one another. With a quickly-beating heart Sally went into the telephone box and answered. As if directly in her ear, Gaga spoke; but his voice was so strained that she hardly recognised it. She was still unforgiven. The voice said: "Sally, my . . . my mother's very ill. I must stay here. I shan't come to the hotel to-night. You . . . you'll be all right."

Like lightning Sally answered: "I'll go home to-night."

The voice said "Wha-at?" and she repeated her reply. Gaga seemed almost pleased. He commended the plan. And Sally hung up the receiver with a sudden flush that made her whole body feel warm. It was a profound relief to her. And in the midst of relief she found another emotion more vehement still. She found passionate joy, and overwhelming temptation, and then again a sharp icy fear. The emotions were all gone in an instant. She was once more self-possessed. She returned to the workroom with an impassive face.

"He didn't say anything about Madam. He wants me to take round a parcel he left here last night," she glibly explained. "He's not coming in to-day at all. I'm to take it round after I leave work."

With immediate care, she went into Madam's room and made up a small parcel containing a cheap novel which Gaga had left there. This she brought to her place and kept before her. Incredulously, the other girls watched and sneered. It was the first inkling they had had of any special relationship between Sally and Gaga. To the minds of all occurred memory of that scene in the country, when Gaga had been entranced by Sally's song. They remembered the unknown girl's joyous yell, "What price Gaga on the love path! Whey!" And they

remembered Miss Rapson's word about Sally—"deep." The white-faced cocket! Rose Anstey stared angrily at Sally, who returned the glance with a coolness the more destructive because it arose from indifference. But Sally knew all that was going on around her. Gaga had been a fool to ask for her pointedly; and yet what else, in the circumstances, could he have done?

Her excitement rose as the afternon progressed; and by the evening she was in a fever. When all the other girls were gathering together their work and their out-of-door clothes she joined the general mêlée with something that approached fierceness. It was not that Sally had any need to hurry, for there were two hours ahead of her; but she was on fire to be gone, to take her little parcel to the hotel, to give the clerk there news of her intended absence for the night, and to make a careful toilette before her appointment. The time was too slow for Sally. She was biting her lips with impatience more than an hour before the time agreed upon for the meeting. Her old longing for Toby had come back with extraordinary strength. As the darkness grew she slipped out of the hotel and into the night-sheltered streets. For long she walked rapidly about London, examining each clock she passed until the vagaries of them all so heightened her passion that she could have shrieked at their fresh discrepancies.

And at last it was nearly eight o'clock, and she walked round and round the Marble Arch in the tortured light of the ballooned lamps, and round the outer side of the wide road thereabouts. There was as yet no sign of Toby. It wanted two or three minutes to the hour. A rush of traffic made Oxford Street roar as if with fury. It was like the sea, but without gradations of sound. Big red motor-omnibuses thundered along, and cabs flew by. There were occasional electric broughams such as

she coveted, which tinkled a bell instead of sounding some one of the ugly horns which added their noise to the general racket. And Toby did not come. A panic seized her. Perhaps her letter after all had been forwarded to him? Perhaps he was not coming? Much as she had dreaded his violence, such a failure now impressed her as even more sinister. She had stopped dead in the violence of this sudden thought, and was for the moment blinded and deafened, when Toby gently took her arm. Sally's first jump of horror was followed by such an abandonment to his arms that she was rendered quite unconscious of the place and the notice of those who passed. Only she recognised that Toby was there, that he was not angry, that he was the same strong lover she had always known, ready and determined, her lover among all men.

"Not the pictures. Not the pictures," she pleaded, with tears in her voice. "Come for a walk. Come this way!"

She pulled at Toby's arm, and drew him towards the entrance to Hyde Park. Her arm was hugging his, her body pressed against Toby's. Only when they were out of that circle of light did she feel safe, appeased, able to think with any of her old clearness. She had been a frightened child. Now she was an exultantly happy one, given over to the great joy of the moment.

ix

They were immediately lost in the darkness of the Park, hidden from all, and oblivious of the flashing lamps of vehicles which drove endlessly up the broad road from Piccadilly. And Sally was in Toby's arms, straining him to her, sobbing and uttering little sounds of love and relief.

"Hullo, hullo!" cried Toby, jerking her chin up with a rough hand.

"I thought you'd never come! I thought you wouldn't come!" whispered Sally. "Oh, Toby, I thought you'd never come!" She was hysterical in her joy.

"Course I come!" exclaimed Toby. "Wodjer take me for?"

"Well, *I* didn't know." Sally was quite unguarded. "Thought you might have . . ." She checked herself. Her body was shaken with a little thrill of laughter—laughter of silly joy. She hugged him closer. "Been away a long time this time," she said. Quite a sailor, ain't you? . . . Did you have rough weather? Ship all sloppy with the waves? And you dancing about to keep your feet?"

"It's *always* rough weather," gloried Toby. "Sea goin' all the time. But she's a daisy to keep steady. Wouldn't hardly notice you was moving."

"*I'm* sure!" cried Sally, ironically. "And you and the captain chatting together in the cabin, and all."

"No." Toby was condescending under chaff. "But we're quite . . . Skipper, he's called. You don't call him captain. He's just like me. He's no better; only he . . ."

"Only he knows how to sail a boat," mocked Sally.

"So do I. I sailed her up the river." He was recklessly and untruthfully boastful, as instinct told her.

"*I* should think so." Sally's voice was so jeering that it laughed his pretensions to nothing at all. "And then you woke up."

Toby became expostulatory. But all the time Sally was not listening. She was not thinking of his words at all; but was only conscious of the warm glow running through her at his nearness and his strong clasp. Every now and then she prompted him to kiss her; and

when Toby kissed her she felt as though she did not know what unhappiness was. He was so strong, and his chin so firm and rough; and he had such an air of the salt sea about him, that she was like a baby at the breast. She loved him. No thought of Gaga came. Only the moment's delight absorbed them both.

Presently they began to walk along the dark path, Toby's arm still pressing Sally to his side, and his head every now and then almost savagely down against her hair. The small hat she had worn was taken off, and was carried, swinging. Sally was so small and so comparatively weak beside Toby's burly strength that she was all the time relishing his power entirely to subdue her; and her wits were so quick that she never had a moment's hesitation as to the right way to tease him. She was without any least sensation of unhappiness. She had never been so glad of Toby since their first exulting days of passion, and her whole nature was bubbling and trembling towards him in the old way, as if they had come together again after some long dreadful estrangement.

And then Sally remembered Gaga. She had been laughing so much in herself at this long evening of freedom, that the recollection was like ice to her heart. It was all a mockery, a fantasy; and Toby was no more hers. She was separated from him for ever, and the more closely she was embraced by him the less she felt herself free to belong to him. A revulsion of feeling shook her. With an instinctive movement almost savage, she escaped from his arm and walked onward, her face set and her spirits banished.

"No," she cried, when Toby sought to re-establish his protective hold. She was as if deep in thought; but in fact she was not thinking at all, but was only overwhelmed by the old horror of her situation which had

newly arisen after this short respite of dreaming. Toby let her walk alone, and lighted a cigarette, slouching beside her with his hands in the pockets of his jacket. He was a dim hunched figure in the gloom. Sally could not see him clearly; her sense of him was simply of his strength and his responsiveness to her own physical inclinations. The sense evoked in her heart longing which made Sally bow her head. She sighed deeply; her fixed eyes were closed. She was quite blind. For an instant she was lost in grave humility. Her smile in the darkness held such sweetness that it gave proof of her true love, her beautiful and entranced adoration.

"What time you got to be back?" Toby abruptly questioned in a matter-of-fact tone. It was like the unexpected tearing of calico, so sharply did such a demand break the vision and show his insensitiveness to her mood.

"Back?" Sally was dazed. She could not understand Toby's speech. "Back where?" She had an extraordinary feeling of shock. Her peace was destroyed.

"To-night."

Sally caught her breath. In a strained tone that sounded, as she meant it to sound, as though she had been merely inattentive, she made answer:

"Oh, I . . . I'm going home to-night. Holloway. Stopping with mother."

Toby had looked at his watch before throwing his match away.

"It's ha' parce eight," he mentioned.

A fierceness shook Sally. It was more than she could bear. She turned upon him in a fury. With such a snarling venom did she speak that Toby drew himself almost defensively to his full height.

"Don't let me keep you!" she cried. "I didn't know you were in a hurry. If you want to go home, *go*. Go!"

She ended almost in a scream, and her fists were frantically jerked.

"Here!" Toby was disconcerted. "What you talking about? I only said the time." He seized her, and Sally struggled as of old. But she could not resist him. There was too great a discrepancy in their strength, and in their will, when her own will so dangerously betrayed her. Toby held her closer and closer. His grip was tyrannic. Sally's breath was short, sobbing; her eyes were again closed, and her lips tragically pressed together. Her face might have been marble. And as he held her fast, Toby forced back Sally's head and many times kissed her hotly and possessively. "What's the row?" he demanded. She heard the savagery of his tone, and felt his warm breath on her cheek; and some undertone of his husky voice vibrated in her ear. "Ain't you well, Sal?" he whispered. "I never meant I wanted to go home. I don't. You know that. I only said the time. Only . . . how long had we got? Sally, old girl . . ."

"All right, all right!" Sally did not know what she was saying. Her brows were knitted in distraction. Then: "Oh, any old time . . ." And as she spoke temptation suddenly swept her with a tingling heat, and her mouth was dry and her body tense with the excitement of the overwhelming moment. Her heart beat so fast that she was quite breathless. With an impulse too strong for resistance she returned her lips to Toby's, half-crying, and in vehement surrender. She could see no further, could endure no more. At the withdrawal she cried gaspingly: "I needn't . . . needn't go home at all . . . to-night. Nobody . . . expects me. Toby!"

X

In the morning Sally awoke with a heavy heart. Foreboding was more gloomy than she had ever known it. The hotel bedroom in which they had slept was very small, and the walls towered above her. It was a dirty room, and the bright sunlight that came through the slats of the blinds revealed the thick London dust in the curtains and on the walls. Toby was by her side, fast asleep. She had no sense of wrong-doing—it never troubled Sally, who judged her own conduct by exceptional standards; but she was again full of fear. Lightly she touched Toby's thick strong hair, and kissed it, half raised from her pillow; and bending over him. Her love was undiminished, but her fear of him was suddenly increased. And as she withdrew her hand and sat upright she caught sight of the wedding-ring which she had taken from her purse and slipped onto her finger before they reached the hotel. They had come without luggage, and it had been an impulse of caution which had led her to wear the ring. Slowly she turned it round and round upon her finger, not recalling that it was Gaga's ring, not considering her use of it an added dishonour to Gaga, but looking at it abstractedly. The ring meant so much, and so little. Her marriage had meant so much and so little. A faint smile stole to her lips and played about them.

A stirring of Toby's body made her glance quickly down. His eyes were open, and he was staring solemnly at her. His hair was all roughened, and his dark face was puffed with sleep. He looked like her big baby, irresistibly lovable. The smile deepened; but she did not speak. She made no movement at all; and Toby, stretching out a lazy arm, put it round her waist.

"Ugh!" he said, grunting with satisfaction. With

calm pleasure she enjoyed the knowledge of his great muscular strength; but she did not respond to him at all. Toby jerked towards her, so that his head rested against her side, and Sally mechanically crooked her arm lightly over his further cheek. Toby blinked a little,, and yawned, and looked at the sunshine. "Wha's time?" he gaped. "Oh-o-oo."

"Dunno. Oo, bless me!" Sally roused herself. "I mustn't be late." She reached out for Toby's watch, on the table at his side of the bed, and held it up to the light. The time was half-past-seven. She looked at the old watch, a cheap one with a loud tick. "I'll give you a *watch,* one day," she said, condescendingly. "A *watch.*"

"Here!" Toby's voice changed. He caught her wrist sharply—so sharply that Sally almost dropped the watch on the quilt. "What's that?" His tone was so strange that she was surprised, and tried to follow his glance. It rested upon her hand—upon the wedding ring. Sally's blood froze.

"Oh, that?" she said, with an attempt to be easy. "Can't come into a place like this . . . I mean, without a ring of some sort."

"Oh?" asked Toby, sternly. "You know all about it, don't you?"

"Well?" Sally was frightened, but simulating defiance. "It's true, isn't it?"

"Where'd you get it?"

"Shop." She was so afraid that she was insolent.

"I s'pose you're *used* to this sort of thing," cried Toby. He sat up beside her, his face deeply crimsoned, his expression accusing. "Used to it, are you?"

"No!" answered Sally.

"What did you get it for?"

Sally could not hide her trembling. She was blanched,

and her shoulder was raised as if to avoid a blow. It came. Toby released her wrist, and seized her shoulder. Roughly, he so shoved her away from him that she was thrown upon her face. She scrambled out of bed, and stood panting before him, while Toby, kicking down the bedclothes, seemed crouched upon the bed as if he might murderously spring at her. She watched his hands, fascinated by an imagination of their grip upon her throat.

"What did you get it for?" Toby repeated, in a voice of madness.

"To come here."

"Liar!" He leapt out of bed, and Sally, in a panic, turned to fly. She could not escape. Toby held her shoulder again. Again he savagely pushed her, so that she fell against the wall, her head striking it. Sally slid to the floor, shrinking from him, terrified now that death seemed so near. She did not scream. She could still have done so; but it was not her instinct to cry out. "You liar!" Toby said again. "What did you get it for? Christ!" He dragged Sally once again to her feet. His fingers were bruising her arm. She was physically helpless and half-stunned. "Is that the way you make your living?" demanded Toby, beside himself.

"No!" It was Sally's turn to shout. "No, you fool. You *fool!*"

"You dirty little liar! It is!"

"It's not!" cried Sally. With a tremendous effort for self-control she checked a sob that would have plunged her into hysteria. "I'm married!"

Toby fell away, his mouth open. The release sent Sally against the wall once more. He stood looking at her, his face grey, his eyes smouldering.

"You tell me *that*?" he said. "Married!"

"Yes. Married."

He did not speak. He eyed her with a sombre and threatening appraisement. Then, more quietly, he went on:

"You *can't* be. You're mine. You belong to *me*. Nobody else can't have you!"

"Nobody else can have me. But I'm married, all right," Sally told him. She was recovering some composure. When she moistened her lips she glanced sideways at him, like lightning. Toby had not struck her. He was too surprised.

"Married . . . And you come here with me. Liar!"

"My husband's away . . . We don't . . . His mother's ill. I don't love him—never did. We were only married a few days ago. I wrote to you. You never got the letter."

"Oh, *that's* why . . ." Toby's tone was vengeful. His fists were clenched.

"See, Toby, I only love you. Only you. But he's rich. We . . . I don't sleep with him, Toby. He's never . . ."

"You liar!" Toby approached her. Sally could see his teeth glistening.

"I swear it's true. Toby!"

Toby suddenly caught her a blow on the arm which sent her spinning across the tiny room. She held on to the mantelpiece to save a fall. They were both panting now; but Toby was like a bulldog. The colour was returning to his cheeks. He was watching Sally, as she was watching him. She was ready to dodge a further blow; but she knew that if he was determined to kill her nothing would stop him. She was filled with abject fear at her own physical powerlessness. But by now her wits were alert again. Toby made a movement, and Sally started, ready to dart away. He did not come nearer. A stupidity seemed to descend upon him.

A loud rap at the door startled them both.

"Hot water. Half-past seven. And less noise there!" came a loud voice. The whole scene was transformed by the interruption. Both became listless.

"Married!" Toby said, as if to himself. He shook his head.

"I love *you,*" Sally told him.

He sat dully upon the bed. Timidly, for fear of another outburst, Sally approached him. At last, standing by his side, she held Toby's head to her breast, kissing him with little fierce kisses that must have carried their message to his heart. At last Toby's arms were raised, and around her, and she was pressed to him once more. Their lips met. Toby made a muffled, snarling sound that was a mixture of love and hatred and masterfulness. He held her with ferocity. Then, as suddenly, his muscles relaxed, until Sally by repeated endearments baffled his indignation and softened his anger. She was struggling with all her might to keep possession of him, moving each instant with more assurance among his dull thoughts and his easily-roused passions. As the moments passed she knew that she had kept him, and at this knowledge her own passion rose until it equalled Toby's.

"My love," she whispered. "My dear love."

xi

Later in the day, when she was able to think of all that had happened, Sally had an unexpected glimpse of the situation. She realised that she was a victor. She was almost too satisfied. She had no shame, no contrition; she merely knew that if she might still keep Toby her marriage with Gaga would be bearable. She had none of the turmoil of the conventional married woman who takes a lover; but then she had never been trained to be scrupulous. She was still young enough to be in-

toxicated by her own prowess. She could manage Gaga; she could manage Toby; she could manage the business—there was no end to her power. More than anything else, it was necessity to her to gratify her sense of power. If that necessity had been removed she would have known herself for a reckless fool; but the demand for power obliterated every inconvenient thought of risk. As for a sense of honour, Sally had been born without one.

All the girls looked at her "very old-fashioned," as they would have said, when she arrived in the morning; but as the day wore on, and there was no further telephone message for her from Gaga, they began to forget what had happened on the previous day. Sally worked like a mouse, her brain exulting in its vivid memories of her time with Toby; and she did not think of Gaga at all. She only hoped that he would not come to the office. She was feeling too tired to deal effectively with any peevishness from Gaga; although, the causes of her hysteria having been removed, she was not likely to repeat the failure of that other restless night. A heaviness hung upon her as the day wore on; a kind of thick readiness for sleep. She yawned over her work. The workroom seemed stuffy, the day unusually long. The nervous strain of the past few days was reacting, and even Sally's vitality was shaken by the consequences of her successive excitements. When tea-time came she was relieved. But there had been no news of Gaga, or from him: not even a message through Miss Summers. Miss Summers grew more and more fidgetty and anxious as the hours went by.

"I do hope nothing's happened," she clucked. "So funny not having heard. I wonder if I ought to telephone to ask. Perhaps Mr. Bertram's ill. Did you *see* him last night? D'you think I ought to ring up? I'm

so worried. It's so strange, and Madam being so ill, and that."

"I shouldn't worry," urged Sally. "He'll 'phone fast enough if there's anything to say. Look at yesterday."

"Yes; but perhaps he's ill himself."

"Sick," commented Sally. "He's bilious, you know."

Miss Summers shook her head, and sighed.

"Yes," she readily agreed. "I'm afraid he's not the man his mother is."

They had hardly finished speaking when Miss Summers was called to the telephone. She was away for two or three minutes; and returned with tears streaming down her cheeks. All their pink plumpness was softened into a blur of tearful weakness. She was bent and dissolved under disaster. As she made her way up the long workroom to her place the girls all craned their necks to look at Miss Summers, and one or two—the kinder ones—rose to see if they could do anything to comfort her. But it was to Sally that Miss Summers turned, and within an inch of Sally's cheeks that she shook her tear-stained face. At first she could not speak; but grimaced like a child, as if her cold nose was smarting. Sally was first to hear the news; but all of them had known it from the first glimpse of Miss Summers in tears.

"She's gone," cried Miss Summers. "Poor soul, she's gone. And what will happen to us I don't know."

"*We'll* be all right," Sally murmured, with singular confidence. A shock had slightly discomposed her, but it was not a shock of sorrow for the death of Madame Gala. Rather was it a passing thrill of dismay at her own responsibility, which her reassuring speech had been intended to remove.

"She's dead . . . Madam's dead . . ." ran through the workroom. One girl hurried to tell Miss Rapson and

the workers in her department, who came crowding immediately into the room, agog with excitement. They all gathered together in a body, and then in detached groups, talking fast.

"I s'pose we'll all have a day off for the funeral," somebody said with a giggle.

"Oo, yes. Sure to. And have to wear mourning," added another girl, more solemnly and hopefully.

Sally stood, as if by right, with Miss Summers and Miss Rapson. She was definitely a principal figure in the scene. Just as the other girls began to notice this, and murmuringly to comment upon it as a piece of characteristic impudence, Miss Summers had a quick return of memory. Gesticulating with helpless impatience, she said:

"Oh, Sally; I'd quite forgotten. Mr. Bertram *is* ill. And the nurse said he was asking to see you. Yes, asking to see . . . Miss Minto."

Asking to see Sally Minto! There was a thrill among the girls that was even greater than the one which they had felt at the news of Madam's death. Gaga asking to see Sally Minto! Whew! Everything became electric. Rose Anstey coloured deeply, and turned upon her heel. Sally knew they were all staring at her, like fish in an aquarium. With something approaching dignity she ignored them and directly addressed Miss Summers.

"Did you mean he wanted me to go at once?" she asked.

"Yes, child. Yes. At once. Better run along now . . ." Miss Summers was distracted, tearful, inclined to kiss Sally, and altogether without knowledge of what she was doing or what she ought to do. "Wait . . . Tell him—perhaps I ought to write a letter? Oh, dear! I don't know . . ." She pressed her fingers to her tem-

ples. "No, tell him how sorry we all are. Say if he wants *me* . . . Run along, run along!"

"Yes, Miss Summers."

In a very leisurely manner, Sally rolled up her pinafore and put her work away. Then she washed and dressed herself to go out. She walked back through the workroom like a queen, sedately bidding Miss Summers "good-afternoon" and smiling a cool farewell to the girls. The buzz of their amazed whispering followed her into the waiting-room. She felt their eyes like stings in her back. On the way downstairs the memory of the scene and an understanding of the girls' feelings made her laugh. Well, that was that; and she was face to face with her problem in its entirety. Unconsciously, Sally walked more erect.

xii

Sally never went back to the workroom. She hurried from it to the old house in Kensington in which the Merricks had lived for years; and as she saw the house, so black with dust, and the steps that led up to the heavy front door, even Sally's heart quailed. She hesitated for several minutes before going up the steps, and loitered there, a little figure in a grey dress, trim and *chic,* but not at all the girl to take control of such a mansion and of the difficulties which lay within. She could not tell what a mass of custom the house indicated; but her instinct was enough to make her feel extraordinarily small, extraordinarily untrained and incapable. It had been very well for her to suppose that everything could be seized and controlled at a glance. The reality was too solid for a longer dream. Thoughtless, over-confident as her fantasy had been, she had the sense which a child has when a running man comes threateningly

near—of a great shape, of unexpected size and dangerousness, looming out of the focussed picture, and setting all previous conceptions at nought. Here was this giant house, and Madam lying dead in it, and servants who would resent her appearance, and Gaga; and Sally was such a little girl in the face of a definite trial. She was a little girl, and she would never be able to deal with what lay ahead. It was a long, devastating spasm of doubt, like a trembling of the earth. The house towered above her, huge and gloomy; and other houses, equally oppressive, continued from the Merricks' house, with basements and railings and great black fronts and lace curtains, until the road turned and its end was unseen. And Sally, who had lived all her life in small flats and single rooms, was shaken. Her heart sank. She entered the house. Her head was high, from pride; but her qualms were intense. An atmosphere of solemn melancholy made everybody speak in low tones. She had difficulty in remaining calm.

All the rooms were large rooms, filled with large furniture and old pictures and prints. Madam had made her home for comfort; and the taste which had marked her other work was here subdued. An old clock ticked steadily; and if there were no ancient horrors at least the house within did not belie its serious front. Sally was like a little doll, shrinking under the weight of such solid comfort, and not yet able to appraise it in terms of possession and disposal. She was still shy and timid. Wherever, upon this first entrance, she looked round for encouragement, she found none. During that first evening she was so miserable that she could have run away. She was like a child that goes for the first time to school, and feels bereft of every familiar support and association.

But in the morning Sally found everything better. She

saw Gaga's doctor, and she talked to the three servants. She telephoned to Miss Summers and asked her to come to the house in the afternoon. She wrote to Mrs. Perce and to Toby. She nursed Gaga and refused to see the dead body of his mother. Every minute which she spent in the house increased her familiarity with it; and her youth and smallness captivated the three middle-aged servants, who were glad to have somebody there whom they could advise. Sally had long been able to behave as somebody other than a workgirl, and the servants were so well-behaved that they did not make any attempt to be too much at ease with her. Sally, moreover, looked down with all the contempt of her class upon women who worked in domestic service—SKIVVIES! She was drawlingly refined with them, but not grotesquely so, and they respected her.

First in importance among the things which Sally had to seem to arrange was the funeral. She handed all the details to the undertaker. This showed her to be a general. From the first she followed the only possible plan—to give *carte blanche* to those who had to deal with matters of urgency. Gaga was all the time ill. His mother's death had so broken down his strength and his self-control that Sally often found him weak with crying; a pathetic figure, in bed, woebegone and feeble. His delight at seeing her was so violent that he had covered her hands with kisses before he fell back exhausted upon his pillow. He constantly called for her. The servants noticed with clucked tongues how feverish was his devotion; but they also recognised Sally's patience. Sally was angelic to Gaga. She tended him so protectively that one might have thought her loving. And in the rest of her free time she tried hard to learn about the house. Mistakes she made, of course, and many of them; but

she was still shrewd, and if she was often superficial and hasty, at least she was alert.

Miss Summers Sally found invaluable. Once Miss Summers had overcome her surprise at the new order, and once she had found that Sally was the old Sally, who relied upon her, she rose to every call. Her kindness and her generalship were unfailing. She it was who kept the business moving at a trying time. In her hands orders were filled with the expected promptitude and the customary excellence. She obsequiously interviewed those who came to be fitted; and her knowledge of the business enabled her to satisfy these customers and make them understand that in spite of the extraordinary conditions they could still rely upon proper attention. She was unsparing of her time and her devotion. She had at last a satisfactory mission.

And all this Sally recognised. While Gaga claimed her attention, and household affairs worried her, she did not trouble very much about the business. Miss Summers would come in the evening to Kensington, tell her the news, and give advice upon other matters. The two had long talks at night. Sally suddenly knew how valuable a friend she had in Miss Summers. She knew the value of an unselfish readiness to serve; and she herself was generous enough and, in a sense, imaginative enough not to exploit Miss Summers. There was a good understanding between them. And Sally, as she looked round at the mahogany furniture in this old house, and saw the dull carpets and engravings which Madam had gathered together in other days for the suitable adornment of her rooms, could think of no better repayment than a gift of some of the things which Miss Summers might prize, and which Sally and Gaga could never use. It was characteristic of her that she made this definite reservation; but with Gaga's consent she finally made Miss Summers

happy by such a lavish present that Sally might have done many strange things without ever losing the loyalty of her adjutant.

She slept by herself in a room connected with Gaga's room by an open door. She was thus able to tend him during his frequent fits of sickness and weakness, which often took the form of long hypochondriacal attacks; and was at the same time given opportunity for active thought and planning. Sally was very happy in these days, for nothing gives greater happiness than incessant occupation that is flattering to the vanity. She walked with a new air, looked about her with confidence and a sense of ownership. Above all, she had reached that almost superhuman state—she knew herself to be indispensable.

xiii

When Gaga seemed to be well enough, they went out for a time each day, and Sally tried to interest him in plans for a change of home. He was still so feeble that he was rather listless and querulous; but when she told him the sort of flat she wanted nearer town, and the sort of furniture, Gaga caught fire, and became enthusiastic. His eyes glowed. Much more gently than ever before, and to that extent more tolerably, he kissed her. He proclaimed Sally's genius. Everything she suggested appeared to him more excellent than the last thing: if she had been a silly girl she might have been made reckless. But having interested him she became rather afraid of his eager support. The flat was to be *her* flat. She did not want Gaga blundering in with enthusiastic mistakes. And another thing was that the doctor warned her about the dangers of excitement.

"Your husband's not a strong man, Mrs. Merrick,"

he said. "He's not even a sound man. You don't want him to get too excited. It's bad for him. Go slow."

"I'll try," agreed Sally. But it was with a shrug. "You see how he is. I mustn't be out of his sight; and yet *something's* got to be done."

"You're a very plucky girl," remarked the doctor, feebly; and he went away.

Sally's shrug had been sincere. She would have preferred to do everything alone; but to do so would have been to make Gaga fully as ill as any over-excitement could do. They accordingly went about together, looking for a flat. They discovered one at last in Mayfair; and decorations were begun there. It was not a large flat, and the rooms were not all large; but it was cosy, and the furnishing of it was going to give Sally a satisfaction hard to exceed. The two of them exulted in the flat. They walked through and through it. They saw the wallpapers and the paint, and admired everything in the most delicious manner possible.

And then the doctor's warning was justified. Gaga collapsed. He fainted in the flat, overcome by the smell of paint and the excitement of proprietorship. With the help of one of the painters Sally took him home in a cab and put him to bed. The doctor arrived, nodded, and was not in the least surprised or alarmed. Sally was merely to be Gaga's nurse once more. It did not matter to the doctor, who had no interest in Gaga except as a patient.

"It's rough on you, though," he said to Sally. He was a bald man of fifty, with a cold eye and a cold, fish-like, hand. He was interested in nothing outside his profession and his meals. To him Sally was a plucky little thing; but Sally could not find that he thought anything more about her. She shrugged again. "So sorry," said the doctor. "Good-bye."

When he had gone, Sally frowned. Bother! All her plans were interrupted. Her energies were subdued. Thoughtfully, she began to consider how far she might act alone. She wondered whether she might persuade Gaga to let her go out in the mornings or the afternons. He *must* do so, and yet she knew he would not like it. Although the decision always lay with her, he had the sick and nervous man's fussy wish to seem to make a choice. He wanted to be there, to be heard, to announce Sally's decision in a loud voice as his own.

"What a man he is!" thought Sally. "Big kid. Got to have a say in everything. And he *can't!*" The last words were spoken aloud, so vehemently did she feel them. "He can't, because he doesn't know. O-o-oh!"

She beat one hand upon the other, in a sudden passion. For a moment she had an unexpected return of hysteria. And as she took two or three fierce paces Sally without warning felt dizzy. She clung to a chair; and the dizziness immediately passed. It frightened her, none the less, because she had been feeling unwell for some days, and she had a horror of illness.

"Here, here!" she exclaimed. "None of that. *I* mustn't get ill. Oh, lor! If I was to get ill *wouldn't* there be a shimozzle! Gaga'd go off his head. And everything else—pouf!"

It amused her to realise this. It made her forget the unexplained sick dizziness which had given rise to her reflections, because the thing which Sally above everything else had always desired was to be as important as she now found herself. At the age of eighteen she was dominating a world which she had long since determined to conquer.

xiv

During the week following, Sally had no time for anything but atendance upon Gaga. She was herself feeling sick and wretched; and Gaga was very ill indeed. He was sometimes extremely feeble, so that a lethargy fell upon him and he lay so quiet that Sally believed him to be asleep. But at her first movement he would unclose his eyes and groan her name, groping with his fingers to detain her. So she sat in his big square bedroom with the drab walls and the plain furniture, watching the daylight fade and pondering to herself. It was a gloomy period, and it had a perceptible effect upon her vitality. At other times Gaga would rally, would even sit up and talk in his old stammer, his grey face whitened and sharpened by illness. Always he demanded her kisses, although at times she had such horror of being made love to by one so ill that she was pricked by a perfect frenzy of nerves. He would sit by the fire, passing his thin hands across her shoulders, stooping and caressing her and catching her neck with his fingers in order to bring her cheek the more submissively to his own. His lips were ever encroaching, and his fevered clasp was so incessant and so vibrant with overstrung excitement as to create a sense of repulsion. It was a tyranny, to which Sally listlessly yielded because she had not the spirit to resist. She also knew that resistance would make him ill again; and however much she chafed at his kisses she chafed still more at the constant attention demanded by Gaga's state of health, which kept her ever there and delayed intolerably the execution of those plans which would have interposed a relief from these intimacies. Then again he would be seized with fits of vomiting which shook his frame and made him so ill that he had to be helped back to bed and comforted as if he were a child. It was a

weary time, much shorter than it appeared to be in her slow watching of the clock; and she could not have endured it at all if her resolution had been less tough. Sometimes, too, Sally knew that she was rather fond of Gaga. Her feeling for him was a mixture of emotion; but she never actively disliked him, even when she was bored by his constant show of possessiveness. The truth was that she had grown to be afraid. She was like a Frankenstein, and her monstrous plan had become too great to be carried through alone. She was frightened that Gaga would die; and she did not want him to die. He was necessary to her, because at present he was the key to her scheme of immediate life.

Each evening Miss Summers came; and the tale she brought of orders given and executed was satisfactory. But even Miss Summers knew that things were not going well. All that practical direction which Madam had brought to the business was lost. Everything that had given distinction in the choice of material and style was in danger. There were new purchases to be made, and new designs furnished. All that vast part in the business which occurred before a customer entered into negotiations had been managed entirely by Madam, and it was suspended in her absence. Some of this work was routine, and could be conducted without her; but as the days passed it became evident that important matters were being delayed, that they were accumulating, that unless something could be done quickly to check the slide the business would become mechanical and its individuality be destroyed. Thus Sally learnt that her ambition had led her to grasp at power which she could not wield. If she had been able to go to work she could have learnt very easily. She had such quick taste, and such confidence, that, with Miss Summers at her side, in spite of many mistakes, she could have dealt with much that was

now slipping. But she was unable to leave Gaga. When she tried to explain the needs of the moment to him Gaga turned weakly away, incapable of grasping more than the fact that she was his wife and that he needed her. At speech concerning the business he shrugged his shoulders, and became stupidly ineffective.

One night, when she was in bed, Sally thought of all this, and was first despondent and then dispirited. The mood intensified. Once it had gripped her she knew no peace. She was in helpless torment. Before she knew quite what she was doing she had drawn the bedclothes over her head and was bitterly sobbing. Little disjointed phrases were jerked from her lips in this painful abandonment to fear and the sense of lonely powerlessness. She was at last unrestrained in her admission of failure. She did not know . . . she did not *know.* By herself she could do nothing. And there was nobody to whom she could turn for succour. Her mother was useless, Mrs. Perce was useless. Her one support was Miss Summers, and Miss Summers this evening had been unable to hide her trepidation, but had sat licking her lips and blinking her eyes, which held such concern that she could in no way disguise the cause of her gloom. Miss Summers also, then, was full of foreboding; and Sally, tied fast here, a child, thrown off her balance by illness and nervous excitement, had lost confidence in her star.

When she was calm again she slept; but in the morning the preoccupation returned to her, and her head ached, and the tears filled her eyes as though she were fighting against grief. And her first visit to Gaga disgusted her and made her feel the more miserable. She had often been more poignantly affected, but never had she experienced such a sense of complete distaste for life. She was like a child given an impossible task to perform; and instead of being able to rise on the wings of her ar-

rogance as she was in the habit of doing, Sally was weighed down by leaden sickness and fear. She went slowly downstairs to have her breakfast, and sat solitary in the big brown dining-room which overlooked a square of grass and a high wall. A dismal grey oppressed the atmosphere, and an autumn chill. She could not eat, could only sniff despairingly and drink a cup of tea and wander to the fire and lay her forehead against the mantelpiece, which was cooling indeed, but without comfort. Its hard coldness was unbearable. Sally's arms crept up as a pillow. She stared downwards at the dead fire.

"O-o-oh!" she groaned bitterly. "I wish I was dead! I do wish I was dead!" And at the sound of her wretched voice Sally once more gave way completely and began to sob aloud. She was beaten, and her spirit was gone.

XV

And so more days passed, each filled with a sort of numbing dread. Sally thought of the business, of her future, of Toby—from whom she had received several letter reflecting his moods of ferociousness and resentment,—and of the bonds which kept her tied to the house. She knew during all this time no peace. She grew thinner, and began to take less care of herself. She was not aware of the beginning of a loss of self-respect, but it was there. She—she who had always been so strict in regard to her toilette and dress, whatever her state of mind—went down to breakfast one morning in a kimono which she had found in Madam's wardrobe and shortened for herself. It was a proof that she no longer cared for her appearance. She lay through the nights often only half-asleep, in a stupor which presently led her to an attitude almost of indifference to the needs of

the day. And for the rest of the time Sally was so lethargic that it one morning occurred to her to think that she had caught from Gaga whatever was the unnamed illness from which he was suffering. The thought, once arisen, flew to her head. It became a horror. She had heard of bad fruit corrupting fruit that was sound; and this was a new preoccupation for her. When Gaga would have kissed her lips she turned away in sudden nausea, fighting instinctively against a subjection which her indifference had hitherto made allowable. And she had several times to invent an excuse to be alone, so active had her distress become; and in these absences she would walk vehemently up and down the dining-room until she was forced by exhaustion to sit or by a message from Gaga to return to his room.

"Why, whatever's *come* to me?" she demanded. "It's awful! I'm ill."

The doctor called every day to see Gaga, and spoke as though there was a definite improvement in his patient's health. The medicine Gaga was taking would finally give him strength. Already he was beginning to eat more, and beginning also to retain what he had eaten.

"It's nerves, you know," the doctor told Sally one day. "Mere nerves. Your husband's run down. He's not strong. He's had a shock. As soon as he's well enough he ought to be got away for a holiday. You take him away. About the end of next week, if he makes good progress. Take him to the sea."

"He hates it," cried Sally. "Upsets him."

"Oh." The doctor considered. "Where did you go for your honeymoon? Penterby—well, that would do, if you can take drives to the sea. He doesn't want too bracing a place. And now, Mrs. Merrick, I've been noticing *you* lately. You're run down, too. We can't have you ill. You've been very plucky; but you've had a

great strain, and all this nursing has worn you out. I'm going to have a look at you . . ."

Sally was conscious of a sinking of the heart.

"I'm quite all right!" she protested. She could not have told what intuition had created this panic; but her heart had begun instantly to thump in her breast, and she became, as she had done once before, almost dizzy. She could not say anything more. She submitted to his examination, and answered his questions. It was an ordeal, and she watched his serious face with its cold eyes, and felt his chilly hand, and guessed at what he would say. The doctor seemed appallingly slow, appallingly deliberate and immovable and ruthless in his perceptions. She was terrified. The room wavered before her; and her fright grew greater and greater. He was very patient. She felt strange trust in him; but always the same dread, which made her teeth chatter a little. Soon he had finished; and then he looked at her with a slight smile and a nod.

"Yes," he said, reflectively. "Oh, there's nothing to be alarmed about at all. Nothing. All you've got to do is to take care of yourself, and not worry; and it will do you good to get away. Women in your condition, especially if it's the first, often . . ."

"*My* condition!" exclaimed Sally. It was like a blow. "Doctor!"

"Nothing to be alarmed at," he repeated. "You'll be very happy after a bit. You know, you're going to have a baby. He stood away from her, smiling in a friendly way.

"A baby!" Sally was shaken from head to foot. She stared at the doctor in an extremity of horror. "A baby!"

He patted her arm. Before she was able to collect herself he had gone—a busy doctor with a long round and

a large practice. Sally sat looking at the fire. Then she rose. A scream came to her lips. Again and again she shuddered. A baby! A baby! Toby's baby!

xvi

The news confirmed what Sally had never consciously thought, but what she now felt she had known for days. If anything had been needed to complete her despair it was this. She felt suicidal. She could have borne illness, even failure in the business, even all the complications of distress which she had been already experiencing; but the knowledge of ultimate disgrace so inevitable drove her mad. Vainly Sally's mind flew in every direction for relief—the doctor might be wrong; the coming of babies could be prevented; perhaps Gaga might never know—she could persuade him to go away, could go away herself, could do a hundred things to tide over the difficulty. And at the end of all these twistings of the mind she would find herself still terribly in danger, and would fight against hideous screaming fits by lying on the floor or on a couch and crushing her handkerchief into her mouth. She was quite overcome by her new disaster, the fruit of wild temptation, and the consequence of her whole course of action. Used as Sally was to meeting every emergency with cool shrewdness, she could not bring to her present situation the necessary philosophy, because she was ill, and fear-stricken, and made crazy by the impossibility of finding a solution to her anxieties.

Hour after hour was spent with horrible nightmarish imaginings, in frenzied self-excuses and improvised expedients. And never did there come one moment of peace in the midst of all this panic. Sally had no friend. More and more she began to realise this. She had no

friend. She had made use of people, they were fond of her, would submit to her; but she had no friend. More than anything in the world she now needed a friend. There was nobody in whom she could confide, from whose love and sympathy she could draw the strength which at this point she so greatly needed. She had a husband, a lover, a mother—to none of these could she go with the truth. It needed all Sally's egotism to make the truth seem capable of justification, or indeed to make it seem even credible, so different is the standard by which we judge our own actions from that which we apply to others. Sally saw everything so much in relation to all that she had ever thought and felt that she could not understand how her impulses might horrify one coming to them only after translation into action. She only knew that she could not betray herself unreservedly to anybody with the hope of being found innocent. The knowledge made her at first full of terror; and the terror and the successive elaborate self-explanation, given to an unresponsive silence which she could easily suppose to be hostile, made her obstinate; then she became the more passionately afraid. She could have stormed, lied, wriggled; but she could never hope to escape the consequences that she dreaded.

At times Sally could not bear to be with Gaga at all. She told him she was ill, and that the doctor said she must go out; and in spite of his protests she would run from the house and walk rapidly for an hour about Kensington, and even into Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. The weather made no difference to her. She was desperate, and must seek some relief from the horror of being cooped up in that house with her secret. She had begged the doctor to give no hint of it to Gaga, and had tried to pretend to herself that he had been mistaken in his diagnosis; but her pretence was of no avail, be-

cause each day she became more certain that he had been right. And still she could not think of any way out. She had been betrayed by a single act of irresistible passion.

Presently, as her frenzy spent itself, Sally began to think more collectedly. She remembered Toby's last letter. She began to think of him. She thought even that she could run away and be divorced and abandon all her schemes for the sake of the baby. But as soon as Sally had such an imagining she knew that it was an impossibility for her. Only as a last resource could she accept her disaster. All her self-confidence fought against it. She must find some other way. At first she thought it would be simple to do so; but as her brain worked upon the problem she found so many difficulties in the way that she again lost hope. The baby would ruin everything. Finally the return of Toby seemed to her to be the first necessity. She must see him. She could do nothing until she saw him. Longing seized her —a quick sense that at least he was her lover, and therefore her partner. She wrote to Toby, asking him to come and meet her as soon as he reached London. Then she waited, her exhausted torments having left her in a mood of glittering-eyed sullen misery that might at any moment rise sharply to angry shrillness. Calm hid genuine fear, and it was the calm of one who has no hope other than self-control.

Gradually Sally came to know the big house in exact detail, because in these days she was forced to find occupation for herself. The drawing-room, the dining-room, all the rooms upstairs, were ransacked. They held no treasures, indeed; but they gave Sally a rather distracting interest because they aroused her sense of possession. She had wanted to own things—and these, although they were not what she had pictured, were property. There

was the beginning of bourgeoise acquisitiveness and pride of ownership in her, after all. Scratch the worker and you found the bourgeoise. There were carefully-hoarded lengths of rich material in the cupboards, lace and ribbons and shawls in different chests of drawers; upon Madam's dressing-table was a manicure set and a set of tortoiseshell-backed brushes; in the drawers of the same table were perfumes in great variety. Far below stairs, Sally found the wine cellar, and although it was small in size it contained more kinds of wine than she had been able to imagine hitherto, and filled her with an almost grinning satisfaction. Not yet was her sense of social ambition roused; but it was born. She began to look ahead. Parties, with the wine as a feature of them, were imagined. She began, in a manner, to picture what she would lose by defeat. The baby would ruin all. And she was helpless, because she could speak to nobody. She was condemned. There would be ruin, dreadful ruin, and she was glimpsing the very things which she might have enjoyed. Fresh paroxysms shook Sally. Somehow—somehow, and by some means not as yet to be discovered, she must save the situation. And Toby must save her. Toby must find a way. He must do it because he loved her. It was his duty. He *must* find a way to save her. And even as she frantically said this, Sally knew that she herself must control the situation. Thus early in her life she had learnt that for a girl of her type men, whatever her desire for any other state, must always be employed under her direction. Toby would obey. He might do the donkey-work; but in fact Sally must lead. It was her fate, the fate of the girl with her own star to follow.

Nevertheless, it was upon Toby that the immediate future depended. Not yet has woman the power to attain her ends except by and through men. Sally waited

in ever-increasing excitement for some word from Toby, some hint of his coming. She was kept within the house at all times except during her short flights in the morning or afternoon. She could not be long away from the house. And she must rely upon a letter, and then perhaps a brief meeting, for her purposes. The time was going. Gaga was getting better, was growing more and more like the man in whose company she had gone to Penterby. His demand upon her presence was increasing in power, because he was sitting up, leaving his room, coming in search of her. Sally felt that already he was beginning to exercise an inquisition. A tremor shook her nerves. Sometimes it seemed to her that Gaga's glance held a strangeness, almost a faint suspicion. When she thought that she was conscious of a feeling akin to aversion.

Aversion had not yet arrived. Gaga was still to be despised. But Sally already felt that she might presently find her task of deception very hard under the constant scrutiny of such futile devotedness as he displayed. And Toby did not write. She had no means of knowing where he was, whether the voyage upon which he was engaged would be long or short, how much more time must elapse before their meeting. The suspense was killing her. More than once, hearing Gaga calling to her, Sally had hidden from him, and, at discovery, had been unable to conceal the hard coldness of her feeling for him. If Toby would only come! If he would only *come*! She thought that her nerve must before long give way, and once it had gone she would be prematurely ruined. She felt trapped. She even, desperately, would slip on a coat at nights and walk up and down outside the house, in case Toby should be lurking near on the chance of seeing her. She thought he might come thus. And on each occasion when she went out of the house in

this way she returned to find Gaga standing in the dining-room, with the door open in such a way that he could command a view of the inside of the front door. The knowledge that he was waiting for her, and watching her, filled Sally with cold fury. His innocent delight at her return had the air of being a pretence. She could not suppose his eager caresses to be other than penitence for suspicion or an assertion of his claims upon her in perpetuity. The distress made her unresponsive, even repressive. Her foot tapped upon the floor even while she could not wholly quell his convulsive nervous embrace. And Toby did not come.

At last, one evening, her guess was justified. She had taken her coat, and had walked to the end of the road; and just as she turned back, without hope, she saw a burly figure almost opposite. It was Toby, in a sailor's short thick jacket, and his neck muffled, and a cap over his eyes. He was standing in the shadow, and as she crossed to him allowed Sally to enter that same embracing darkness which safely hid them both. She gave a little savage cry, and was in his strong arms, almost crazed with relief and her physical sense of his so long withheld nearness. She could feel herself shuddering and trembling, but she was not directly conscious of this. All she felt was a passionate joy at being able to abandon all her nervous self-control to this firmness and clenched vigour.

"Oh, Toby, Toby!" she whimpered, clutching him; and then no more for several minutes. Toby did not speak. He hugged Sally until she was breathless, and his hot kiss made her cheek burn. She pressed her forehead with all her strength against his breast, and longed that in this moment she might for ever lose all knowledge of the trials which beset her. The trembling persisted

for a long time; and then, as she was comforted, it began to subside.

"My girl, my girl!" muttered Toby, in a thick voice, warm against her ear.

"Toby, listen . . . Toby, I'm going to have a baby—it's your baby. What *shall* I do? Toby!" Sally clung to him. "I'm so frightened, Toby."

"Baby? Christ!" As suddenly, he repulsed her. "You say it's *me*. It's a lie! How d'you know? You little liar, you. What's your game?"

"Of course it's yours," fiercely cried Sally. "I told you."

"D'you think I believe that!" He was brutally incredulous. He held her away. "Why, you dirty little liar, you'd swear *anything*."

A ghastly anger took command of Sally.

"I told you," she steadily repeated. But she made no attempt to go back to him. They stood quite apart in the difficult gloom.

"I know you did. You told me you loved me. You married *him*."

"I *told* you," she obstinately went on. "I told you. I don't know what to do. He'll find out. He's bound to find out."

"He'll think it's his," said Toby. "By God, I believe it is."

"You're mad!" cried Sally. "He knows it *can't* be. And you know it, too. I tell you I shall be found out and disgraced." She was not crying. Her pride was aroused. She was full of scorn for one who could disbelieve what she herself knew to be true.

"Well?" Toby demanded. "What of it? Whose fault is it?" He was brutally angry, and a little frightened and blustering. They were still at arm's length in the darkness of the deserted street. There was no lamp near

them, and the houses behind were unlighted. Sally's heart fell. She was almost paralysed at Toby's tone. She was puzzled and chagrined and angry. And then a change of mood came abruptly upon her.

"Don't you love me?" she mournfully asked. "I thought you did. I love *you,* Toby. I thought you loved me."

"I used to," came the grim reply out of the night. He sounded cautious, doubtful.

"Not any longer?" She withdrew herself wholly from him. They were completely sundered. Toby was failing her. She was stone cold to him—cold to all the world.

"Who says I don't?" asked Toby, in a grumbling way. He put out his arm, but Sally stepped back. "Here."

"No," she cried, sharply. Toby was not to take her for granted, not to hold her and make love to her. She was in earnest, and he was giving himself away as one who had taken what he could get.

"I do." At last Toby's sullen assent reached Sally.

"You think I'm a liar," she persisted. "You don't love me." It was bitter.

There was a silence. Toby was almost invisible. Both were lost in the dull estrangement of that troubled mood.

"Yes, I do," he muttered. "You *are* a liar."

"I'm not. It's true what I say. If Gaga finds out . . ."

"Well? What d'you suppose *I* can do? *I* can't do anything. It's you who's got to do something."

Sally thought for a moment at that savagely bullying tone, which was without love or understanding. She had a sudden sweep of hatred of Toby as an animal that took no heed of responsibility or consequences. The chill she had felt already deepened and filled her heart. Her loneliness was intensified. She gave a short laugh of bitter

distraction. A greater fierceness shook her, and she began to walk slowly away from him.

"Oh, well then, I'm done," she said, with cold recklessness. "All right."

"Sally!" He came slowly after her; but his pursuit was not the old vigorous insistence for which she longed. He wanted Sally—not a baby, not a difficulty. He would shirk anything but the fulfilment of his passion. Instantly, she felt that he never would have married her if the time had come.

"No!" It was a harsh cry. "Don't touch me. Go on, push off . . . I'm done with you." She walked more rapidly. She was only a little way now from the house, a hatless, disconsolate figure, oppressed and rigid.

"Sally." But he was still slow to follow. Sally cracked her fingers. She was finished with him. Her heart and her feet alike were leaden. She was too far gone for tears or sobs. It was not anguish that she felt; but bitterness so great that she could only hate Toby. She had loved him so much! And this was the end of him. She felt her love killed at a blow, and she was without resource.

Suddenly strong fingers were upon Sally's shoulder. In other days she would have been dominated. Not so now. She wrenched herself free, and walked on. There was no attempt to run. She was finished . . . finished. Some further sound she heard; but it was unintelligible. Toby, presented with a real problem which a man who loved her would have solved, had been proved a doubting coward. She felt wronged, deceived. She had always expected violence from him, but she had always expected him to know that she truly loved him, whatever her actions might seem otherwise to suggest. Realisation of his ignorance destroyed her. Even at the gate Sally might still have been won; but as she came abreast

of it she saw that the front door was open, and Gaga standing upon the top step. Coldly, she shut the gate; and walked resolutely up the steps. Toby was left dodging out of the circle of light, a pitiful conspirator. Gaga was silhouetted, a long lean figure, against the light of the hall. He peered down into the darkness.

"Sally, is that you?" he exclaimed. "I was quite anxious."

"Were you?" It was listless, scornful.

As she passed him, Gaga gazed still into the darkness.

"Is that somebody with you?" he asked. "It looks . . ."

Sally went into the house, and as he followed her she closed the front door quietly. It was strange to come from the black chilliness of the street into this new solid warmth and comfort. In the hall they faced one another. For once Sally was as grey as he—as grey and trembling.

"I thought . . . I thought it was a man," said Gaga.

"Oh, did you?" Sally slipped off her coat, and threw it upon a chair. She was listening intently.

"Wasn't it?" Gaga did not touch her. He looked down with a startled expression. "It looked like a man out there . . . Wasn't it?"

"You'd better go out and see," advised Sally, with snapping teeth. "Then you'll be sure." As a fury possessed her, she turned upon him like a cat at bay, all her teeth showing. "Funny if you were spying on me without any reason, wouldn't it be!"

She was so reckless that she did not measure consequences. She was in no mood to be cautious or considerate. Leaving him there Sally went into the dining-room, and when Gaga entered upon her heels she went out of the room again and slowly up the stairs.

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But all the time, although she seemed to ignore him, Sally with a part of her consciousness was listening and watching. She dreaded to hear the groan of the gate upon its rusted hinges, the noise of a knock, or the gentle sound which the front door would make if Gaga accepted her challenge. Her heart was almost silent as she waited, and then, as the minutes passed without interruption, her relaxation was half relief and half disappointment. Something within her had craved this crisis which had not arrived. Some sensual longing for violence was frustrate. Sally was alone with Gaga, and Gaga, humble and obedient, was in her track, coming slowly and affectionately after her. As she saw from the landing the top of his dark, grey-streaked head she almost screamed with fury. It was in that moment that aversion for him rose in a tumult from her heart. She hated Toby, but for his base cruelty alone. She hated Gaga for his inescapable possessiveness and gentle persecution. It was a horror to Sally in her abnormal condition. She began to run up the next flight of stairs, and tripped upon her skirt. The stumble brought some little sense to her. She rose, holding the balustrade. Shot through and through with bitterness as she was, she yet clutched at sanity. When Gaga came abreast of her Sally took his arm; and they completed the journey together.

"Sorry I was beastly," she said, with a little pinch of the arm. "Got the jumps."

"I know . . . I know," whispered Gaga. "We'll go away. We'll go very . . . very soon."

"Now?" Sally demanded. "To-morrow? Could we go to-morrow?"

"Well . . . well, perhaps not . . . to-morrow. The day after?" He was hesitant, and did not oppose her.

Sally's lip curled. What a man! Yes . . . yes . . . yes; but the baby! She was again desperately shaken.

"Why not to-morrow?" she cried, almost spitefully. "Why hang about?"

Gaga wavered. He began to kiss her. His hands, holding hers, were clammy. She had a glimpse of the black space under his eyes, and the swollen yellowness of the whites of his eyes, and his grey cheeks, so lined and creased, and the dreadful salmon colour of his dry lips. In his arms though she was, Sally shuddered violently, aversion recurring with such strength that she could not control her repugnance. This was her husband—her *husband*. Her eyes were strained away from him.

"You're cold," Gaga murmured. "Poor little girl . . . You're . . . you're cold."

"Yes, I'm cold," agreed Sally, with a violent effort for grim self-repression. "That's what's the matter with me. I stayed out too long. I oughtn't to have gone out this evening." She again laughed slightly, her laugh so sneering that even Gaga looked up as though he had been startled.

"We'll go to bed early," he said. "It's cold to-night. Let's have something hot, and go to bed. We can't have . . . have you falling ill. It's nursing me that's made you . . . queer."

"Yes, it's all my nursing." Sally spoke in a dry voice, and when he released her she went over to the fire without heeding Gaga, and looked down at its brightness. Still her ears were alert to catch some violence below; and as there was none her heart sank once more. Toby was gone. She had dismissed him and he had gone. She was more forlornly alone than ever. If Gaga had not been with her she must have sought relief in some physical effort, some vehement thumping of the mantel-

piece and a burst into wild crying. The repression which Sally was forced to exercise tortured her. The agony she suffered was almost unbearable. Her mouth was stretched in a horrible grimace, so poignant was her feeling.

"I . . . I'd like something hot," Gaga proceeded, in innocence. "Some . . . some cocoa . . . or . . ."

"I'll get you some." It was with passionate exasperation that Sally spoke; but she was thankful to know that she might leave him for a few minutes. The room seemed to stifle her. She plunged to the door, walking past Gaga with her head averted, so that he might not see her face. The stairs were cold, and she was upon the ground floor in an instant. A servant, called from below, came slowly to receive instructions; but there was no cocoa in the house. Nothing? No coffee? Nothing of the kind was available. Still thankful for the opportunity of turning her mind to details, Sally hurried upstairs again. Gaga was already half-undressed, and stood in front of the fire folding his coat. His thinness was grotesque in the bright light of the gas.

"Oh dear!" he cried. "I wanted it."

"All the shops'll be shut now," declared Sally.

Gaga thought for a moment, his face drawn. He was forced to sit down upon the edge of the bed.

"I . . . I used . . . used to have cocoa in my . . . my study," he said.

"I'll look." Sally went down to the half-landing and into the small room which Gaga had always used for evening work before his marriage. It was quite tiny, and there was a gas fire there, and an armchair, and above the fireplace were some small shelves with a few books upon them. Upon other shelves were many tins and packets and bottles, most of them containing preparations handled by the firm in which Gaga had an

interest. Strange: she had not had to trouble at all about that! The room was very cold, and Sally shivered as she stood examining the contents of the shelves. The tins and packets were all in confusion, large and small jostling one another; and many had their descriptive labels turned to the wall. Sally read upon some of them words the meaning of which she could not understand. Nearly all of them were chemicals relating to the enrichment of soil or to the general improvement of farm produce. Some were quite tiny, with little crystals in them. Others were large, and still within wrappings. She hurriedly read the lettering, darted away to the cupboard, back again to the shelves, and once more to the cupboard. Here there was a litter of papers also, for Gaga was temperamentally fussy and untidy, and everything he owned was in disorder. She put her hand upon a cocoa-tin. It contained white pellets which looked like rice. There was another tin, and this was half-full of cocoa. She gave a cry of satisfaction. And then, as she replaced the lid of this tin she saw another; straight before her eyes; and something made her stop as if she had been paralysed. Fascinated, she read: "POISON: This preparation of Sheep Dip contains Arsenic." There followed some particulars, of which she caught only the word "grains." Poison! Sally cautiously took the tin in her hand, reading again more carefully the words printed upon the label. Funny thing to have in the house, she thought . . . Poison. She replaced the tin upon the cupboard shelf, and carried the cocoa to Gaga.

"That cocoa?" she demanded. "It's all mixed up with poison and stuff. Don't want to *kill* you."

Gaga, by this time in bed, looked at the cocoa, and proclaimed its reality.

"Yes . . . that's . . . co . . . cocoa," he stammered.

There was a pause of some minutes while the cocoa

was mixed; and they both drank it slowly, Sally conscious, as its warmth stole through her body, that she was less extremely unhappy than she had been. She felt a little better. She even kissed Gaga in wishing him goodnight, and received his eager kisses in return without flinching. At last she too went to her bed in the adjoining room, and undressed and lay down in the darkness. From where she lay Sally could hear Gaga moving, and could see the glimmer of the light in his room which would burn until the morning. And as she lay there all her tragic thoughts came flooding back with the intensity of a nightmare. The horrors, for a short time repelled, were stronger than ever. She was tensely awake. Every word exchanged between Toby and herself came ringing into her head. She was aghast at the stupidity, the cruel and brutal stupidity, of her lover. He her lover! Love! why he didn't know what love meant! He would take everything she had to give; and when he was asked to stand by her Toby would repudiate her claim upon him. She was filled with vicious hatred at his betrayal. That was what men were! That was what they did! Shirkers! They were all like that, except when they were ridiculous half-men like Gaga. What was she to do? What *could* she do? Her brain became very clear and active. It was working with painful alertness, so rapidly that she often did not reach the end of one channel before she was embarked upon another. Toby was hopeless. She must act by herself. And what could she do?

Supposing she could do nothing? Disgrace, failure . . . She was frightened. Better anything than disclosure so ignominious. She thought of Gaga: very well, there was still time. He would be better soon, and once he was better she could easily persuade him that he was the father of her baby. That was the simplest plan, and

one which had been so much taken for granted that she had not taken it sufficiently into account as the only safe course. Gaga could be deceived because he had no suspicion of all that went on in her mind, or of anything that had happened in her life. He would soon be better, and when once they were united he would be wholly in Sally's hands. Not yet, though. He must get well. A quick rush of relief came to her as a reassurance. She could have laughed at her own panic. Of course Gaga was the solution. He could be made to believe almost anything. But supposing . . . supposing that he would always be ill? Then indeed she would be better dead. Dead? But how could she die? She might long for death; but death was not an oblivion that could be called up at will. Sally pondered upon the possibilities.

The word "POISON" returned to her memory. Quickly there followed the word "arsenic." Arsenic: what did she recall? Suddenly Sally remembered that evening long ago when she had found her mother reading an account of the Seddon trial. What had Seddon done? All the details came crowding to her attention. He had given poison in food . . . in food. And Miss . . . what was her name? Same as old Perce's—Barrow. Seddon had given Miss Barrow arsenic. It had made her sick. Sally shuddered. She did not want to be sick. She had had enough of sickness in these past few weeks. To her sickness was the abomination of disease.

A terrible shock ran through Sally's body. She lay panting, her heart seeming to throb from her temples to her feet. Miss Barrow had been constantly sick through taking arsenic, and they had only found it out . . . Gaga . . . Sally's face grew violently hot. She could not breathe. She sat feverishly up in bed, staring wildly. An idea had occurred to her so monstrous that she was

stricken with a sense of guilt and self-horror such as she had never known.

xviii

All that night Sally dwelt with her terrible temptation. The more she shrank from it the more stealthily it returned to her, like the slow fingers of an incoming tide. So many circumstances gave colour to her belief that the poison could be given without discovery that Sally found every detail too easy to conceive. Gaga would be sick again and again, would weaken, would . . . Always her imagination refused to complete the story. She covered her face with her hands and sought frantically to hide from this loathsome whisper that pressed temptation upon her. Ill and frightened, she lay turning into every posture of defiance and weakness and irresolution, until the daylight was fully come; and then Gaga's voice called feebly from the next room, and she must rise to tend him with something of the guilt of a murderess oppressing her and causing her during the whole talk to keep her face turned away.

But she found in the interview strength enough for the moment to baffle temptation. To know that Gaga lay helpless there before her—hardly moulded into recognisable form by the clinging bedclothes—was a reinforcement to Sally's good will. His position appealed to the pity she felt—the pity and the contempt. He was so thin and weak, so exceedingly fragile, that Sally could not deliberately have hurt him. Instead, she was bent upon his salvation.

"Bertram," she said. "We *must* get away to-day. This morning. D'you see? We *must*."

"O-o-oh!" groaned Gaga, in unformulated opposition.

"We *must*. We'll go to Penterby this morning."

"But my dear!" it was a long wailing cry, like that of an old woman.

"We've got to go. *Got* to go. *I'll* get *everything* ready. You shan't have to worry about anything at all."

"Sal-ly!" Again Gaga wailed. He tried to pull her down to him, gently and coaxingly. In a sort of hysteria, Sally jerked herself free, looking steadily away. Her mouth was open, and brooding resolve was in her eyes. She was not tragic; she was in confusion, set only upon a single purpose, and otherwise passively in distress. Obstinately she repulsed him.

"It's no good talking. We *must* go. I'm ill, as well as you. The doctor says we must both go away. At once." She was so resolute that Gaga could not resist her. He lay quite still, and for that reason she was forced to look down at him. To Sally's surprise there was upon Gaga's face an expression of such sweetness that she was almost touched. He loved her. "There!" she murmured, as if to a baby; and bent and kissed him. Gaga kissed her several times in return and continued to watch her, still with that strange expression of kindness that was almost worship. He stirred at last.

"I'll get up," he said. "I'll get up now. It's a . . . it's a fine idea. We'll catch the morning train, if we hurry. We'll be . . . be there in time for lunch."

Sally was in such a whirl of thankfulness that she flew to her dressing and packing. She and Gaga were both downstairs and at breakfast within half-an-hour, seated at the big dining-table, and looking very small in that great room. As they sat, Gaga was so happy that he repented of his promise to go away, and wanted to remain at ease in such pleasant circumstances. He began to think of reasons why they should not go away at all. He spoke with regret of the new flat, of their preparations . . . even of the business. But already Sally was

upon her feet. A few minutes later she was telephoning to Miss Summers explaining the sudden change of situation; and then immediately began to pack. It was not a difficult task. She herself had few things to take away. Presently Gaga joined idly in the work; and the two of them neatly folded his clothes and slipped into his dressing-case the articles he was bound to need while they were away.

"My medicine!" exclaimed Gaga, clutching at an excuse.

"Got enough for to-day; and I've got the prescription." Sally was grim. She was more—she was driven by instinct. It was essential that they should go immediately. For one thing Toby might return, and any thought of Toby was so horrible to her at this moment, when her first hatred was giving way to uncontrollable longing for him, that it was like a scourge. And for another thing Sally was in terror of the nightmare temptation. She was fighting against that with all the strength that remained. Even now, if she looked at Gaga, she shuddered deeply.

"What's the time?" called Gaga.

"Miriam . . . telephone for a cab!" Sally was simultaneously giving instructions to a servant. She went to a desk in which she kept money, and found that she had very little remaining. "Bert, got any money? Well, your cheque book?"

"In the study."

It was a fatal word, so carelessly spoken, but like a blow in its sharp revival of something that was being suppressed. Sally hurried to the door of her bedroom. As suddenly, she stopped dead. The study! In a wave all her memory of the previous night's wicked temptation came back to her. It was only with a great effort that she went further. More than a moment passed in a

silent struggle. Almost blindly, she entered the study, and its chill atmosphere was tomb-like in its effect upon her. Again Sally shuddered. Groping, she found Gaga's cheque book, and turned again to the door. The walls of the tiny room seemed to rise forbiddingly around her, to come closer, to begin to topple over as if in ruin. Sally gasped for breath. She cowered. Everything became dark . . . A long time passed before she was again conscious. Clasping the cheque book, Sally felt her way unsteadily, with her eyes closed, until she stood upon the threshold. She was breathing slowly and deeply, and she could see nothing. And at last, fighting still, but incapable of conquering the stronger influence which was being exercised upon her will, she went back into the room, and stood there with her face towards the cupboard. Quietly, as if on tiptoe, she passed in a dream to the cupboard and unfastened it, and without ever once looking about among the other contents of the shelf put her hand upon the fatal tin which she had found while looking for Gaga's cocoa. With this tin in her hand she hastened back to her room, closing the door as silently as she had opened it. The tin was quickly laid among her clothes, right in the corner of her dressing-case, hidden from any prying eye. Then Sally straightened herself, listened and bent down again to fasten the bag. Within ten minutes she and Gaga were out of the house, sitting in a taxi on their way to Victoria Station. Sally pressed herself back in the corner of the cab, not touching Gaga, so that nobody should see her; and at the station she was on fire until they were settled in the railway carriage and the train was slipping gently out from the platform. Then at last she sighed deeply, as if with relief, and the corners of her mouth drooped until she looked like a little girl who was going to cry. The houses became blurred.

xix

Gaga and Sally reached Penterby in a very different mood and a very different state of health from that which had marked their arrival on the previous visit. The station, with its confusing platforms and connecting bridges, was by now familiar to Sally, and she was able to turn at once to a porter and give him instructions. Whereas before they had walked the short distance between the station and the hotel they were now forced to take an open, horse-drawn, cab. It stood waiting when they reached the small station yard, the horse still nibbling feebly at dropped oats upon the paving and with its breath blowing them farther away. The few little cottages near the station were passed in an instant, and the old-fashioned main street of Penterby, reached after a short run between a hedge upon one side and a tall wooden paling upon the other, was about them. Above, the sky was brilliantly blue. In front the houses rose towards the hill-top as of old. There was peace here, if Sally could find it. And she could see the bridge, and the ivy-covered hotel, and the gold-lettered board. She sat as if crushed in her seat in the cab, staring out at the hotel with an expression of strain and eagerness. Beside her Gaga, tired by the journey, yawned behind his long hand, his hat tilted over his eyes, and his mouth always a little open. It was a strange return, and Sally had ado to preserve any lightness of step and tone as she jumped down from the cab and went into the hotel. As before, she noticed the silence and emptiness of the small bar, and the room beyond; and as she tapped loudly Mrs. Tennant came from another room. This time it was Sally who took charge of everything. Gaga drooped in the background, a feeble figure. But he gathered strength to smile at Mrs. Tennant and to greet her.

"I'm not well, Mrs. Tennant," he said. "I've come to get . . . get . . . get well. My wife's ill, too. You . . . you must be very kind to us."

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Tennant, in a fat voice of concern. Her swollen lips were parted in dismay. "But you *both* look so bad! Of course: you can have the same room you had before. Come up!"

She led the way. Sally again caught a glimpse of the drawing-room carpet in its brilliant mixture of reds and blues and yellows, and was immediately afterwards drawn into the old dark bedroom opening upon the glass-covered balcony. She stood in dismay, suddenly regretful that they had come to be stifled there.

"Can we have some lunch?" she asked. "My husband's . . ."

"Of course." Mrs. Tennant's geniality was benignant. But in her eyes there remained that unappeasable caution which Sally had previously noticed. "At once."

Sally slipped out of the room with her. They stood in the narrow drab passage—two black-clothed figures notably contrasted in age and development. Mrs. Tennant was so stout, and Sally so slim, that the difference between them was emphasised by the similiarity of clothing.

"My husband's mother's dead. He was awfully fond of her. He's been ill ever since, and the doctor said he'd better come away."

"You're ill yourself, you know, Mrs. Merrick," exclaimed Mrs. Tennant.

"I've been nursing him a month—night and day. He's not strong. We'd barely got back when she died. What with his illness, and the business—it's been terrible!"

Sally was watching Mrs. Tennant—she did not know why. She felt defensive. All was the result of her own position and the dreadful knowledge which she had of

her last night's temptation. She looked like a young girl, but so pale and hollow-eyed that she would have aroused pity in any woman of experience.

"But it's *you*. I know Mr. Merrick. I've often seen him queer. But you're so changed. When you were here before . . ."

"I know. I'm ill."

"I said to my sister how strong and bright you were. We both thought you'd make a—well, a *new* man of Mr. Merrick."

"It's only his mother's dying like that. He was worried about her, and then she died; and he just went to pieces. He had to be put to bed at once. I'll put him to bed again as soon as we've had something to eat. He's so *weak*. It's the change he wants, and the fresh air."

"And you too, my dear." Mrs. Tennant seemed really to be kind.

"When he's asleep I'll go for a walk. I'll soon be well." Sally was reassuring; but she was made aware of her own weakness by having had attention drawn to the appearance of it.

They parted with smiles. Sally made as if to re-enter the bedroom; but, instead, she went through the drawing-room and on to the balcony. The river was running swiftly up-stream, so that the thick mud was hidden. Back along its course came little floating masses of collected material, like miniature islands in progress up and down the river. Sally stood watching one of these masses, until it grew indistinct as the result of her intentness. The sun was making the houses beyond the river glitter anew, and the whole town was beautified in its light. A feeling of great misery seized Sally. She stared down at the discoloured stream, and her eyes filled with tears. She was again consumed with a sense

of loneliness; and a faint horror of the returning tide caused her to break once again from her contemplation, to walk back through the drawing-room, and to rejoin Gaga. He was sitting upon the bed, regarding with a vacant expression the two dressing-cases which had been brought up to the room and which stood together against the wall. The room was cold and dark. Sally impulsively went to the French windows opening upon the balcony and drew back the curtains.

"There now," she said. "You're going to get better. You can see the sun."

Gaga smiled gently. Sally came back to him and stood with her hand ruffling his thin hair. She too smiled, but with abstraction. She was numbed by illness and horror and the journey and her vision of the dirty merciless water.

XX

When they had eaten their lunch, Sally helped Gaga to undress and left him in bed with the curtains again closed and the bedroom, thus darkened, smelling close and dank, as if it were the haunt of blackbeetles. When the curtains were drawn the whole room faded to a uniformity of grey-brown, and the pictures and ornaments became dim shadows, and the mirror upon the dressing-table took upon itself a mysterious air, as though in its depths one might read something of the hidden future. All was sunk in a sorrowful gloom, and the barely-outlined recumbent figure of Gaga might have been that of a dead man. Upon tiptoe, Sally stole quietly from the room. For a little while she sat alone over a fire which had been lighted in the drawing-room; but the evening was beginning to cast darkness over everything; and in the west the last hot reflections of the sun were cast upon

two or three casual clouds. Sally therefore rose, and took her hat and coat, which were lying near the piano. As it was the middle of the week, and in autumn, the hotel was almost empty, and would not be occupied with any visitors for two or three more days. It was a dull place once the sun had set. For a moment Sally hesitated in putting on her hat; but at last she ventured forth, and was out in the greying street, and upon the bridge across the river. The water, as she hurried by, ran silently below, blackened and threatening, and as there would be no moon the night was coming with great darkness. Over the bridge Sally noticed the early lights in the post office, and a few street lamps. One road ran a little way up the hill and was immediately checked by houses. Another turned off to the north-west, and it was here that she would find a shop at which she could leave the prescription for Gaga's medicine. Once she had performed her task Sally walked briskly on until she came to the end of the houses and into a road to the edges of which trees grew and grass came irregularly running. Beneath the trees darkness already obliterated all shape, and the fringes of the wood were so bare of leafage that she could already look up to the grey sky between the boughs and their filmy branches. No vehicles passed. She was alone upon this broad road, with nothing upon either hand but unexplored depths of shadow and silence. Every now and then a stationary light spotted the dusk. She was appalled by her loneliness.

Quickly as she had walked away from Penterby, Sally returned to the town with even greater speed, warmed by the exercise, but chilled by her thoughts and perplexities. When she was alone, and so hemmed in by sinister darkness, Sally was brought quickly back to her forebodings. She remembered the solitary figure which she had left, and thought of Gaga was shrinking. Of Toby she could

only find herself thinking with anger. Yet it was not wholly anger, for she was also afraid and filled with longing. Her anger was even obliterated by her love, so much did she adore Toby's strength. His cruelty, his brutal indifference, were spurs to her unreasoning affection. Whatever Toby might do, Sally loved him. The love which she had believed herself indignantly to have cast out was still paramount. Finally, in all her fleeting considerations of the moment and the future, she could not ignore the baby which was coming. She had no thought of it other than fear and loathing. Not yet had desire for a child created in her mind a new longing. If she could have killed it she would have done so; and she was prevented from contemplating this possibility only by the ignorance which inexperience and friendlessness imposed upon her. Sally was awed and terrified by the gloom which gathered in her heart and about her. She sped onwards until she reached the bridge, and here for several minutes she uncontrollably paused. All was now black, and the tide had turned. Already the water was flowing to the sea, and she could imagine the coagulated masses vaguely swirling beneath her, borne unresisting upon the outgoing tide. The hotel was in darkness, excepting for the room beneath the balcony where the walls descended straight to the water and the mud. Here there was a dim light. All above was sombre until she reached in her steady upward glance the sky's faint background and saw its unfathomable arch of grey.

The bar of the hotel was empty. Unperceived, Sally went upstairs and into the bedroom where Gaga lay. She closed the door behind her and switched on the electric light. To her surprise Gaga was lying on his side, and his face was turned towards her.

"You awake?" she whispered. At his soft sound of greeting she went forward and sat upon the bed. "It's

half-past-four," Sally continued. "Like some tea? Going to get up again?"

"I . . . I'm so tired," murmured Gaga. He had taken her hand, and held it to his cheek, so that Sally had to lean forward. In this mood he was so like a child that Sally's heart softened. She found him pathetic, and her own strength was emphasised by his weakness.

"Better stay in bed," she said.

"But you? Aren't you . . . aren't you lonely?"

"Mm. Nobody here. Nothing to do. I been for a walk and got frightened."

"I'll get up. Yes, I will. After tea we'll walk along that av . . . avenue. In the moonlight. Like your song."

"There's no moon up yet," Sally told him, not moving. "You stay where you are. Stay nice and warm in bed. I shall be all right. I'll go for a walk along the avenue by myself."

"And be f . . . frightened again."

"Shan't wait to be frightened," Sally said. "See me dart back!"

Gaga fondled her hand and reached for the other one, which she patiently yielded.

"You . . . you're so nice," he murmured. "So good to me."

"I? Good?" Sally's shoulders were hoisted. She almost withdrew her hands.

"Yes. But Sally . . . I . . ." He was overcome, and could not proceed. Tears had started to his eyes. "I haven't been sleeping. I've been thinking. Last night . . ."

"Last night!" Sally convulsively jerked her hands away, and as quickly restored them.

"You thought I'd . . . I'd . . . been . . . been spying."

"Of course you weren't. I was ill. I was a beast."

"Sally, I never did. You . . . you have a lot . . . I've been thinking . . . a lot to put up with. Marrying a . . . a sick man; and you . . ."

Sally could not bear him to talk thus. She freed herself, and rose.

"Here's a lot of talk!" she protested. "You get well, old son. Then we'll see."

Gaga did not say anything for a moment. At last he spoke again.

"Sally, would you . . . would you mind very much if I did . . . didn't get well?" he asked.

"Course I should!" But Sally was filled with alarm at this conversation. She turned upon Gaga, but she could not meet his soft eyes. "Here, you're talking silly!"

"Sally . . . I . . . I wasn't spying," said Gaga, slowly. "But I . . . I *did* see a man at the gate last night."

Sally clutched the back of a chair. For a moment she thought she must be going to faint. Then, with a tremendous effort, she controlled herself.

"What d'you mean?" she demanded.

"Behind you. *With* you."

"Never!"

Gaga continued to regard her. His smile was no longer visible. She only noticed that he was paler, that his nostrils were pinched and his eyes dark.

"I wish you'd tell me the truth," he said.

"I tell you there was nobody *with* me," lied Sally. "Nobody. There may have been a man behind me. I *did* get a bit of a start. Somebody came out of a gate. I didn't notice."

"Sally . . . I . . . I heard him call you 'Sally.'"

She was stricken with terror at his quietness.

"Nobody called me Sally!" she cried. "I don't *know* anybody."

Gaga sighed, and his head fell sideways, so that he no longer looked at her. They spoke no more. She believed that he knew she had been lying; but she had been caught unawares, and could not retract her assertions. Without a further word she began to prepare a basin of water, and washed herself. Then she went to ask that tea might be brought to the bedroom. They drank the tea in silence, both very grave. When they had finished, Sally took the tray to the end of the passage, where there was a projecting ledge, and then returned to the room.

"Shall I go and sing to you?" she asked.

"Not . . . not now. Go for your wa . . . walk. I shan't have any dinner. I'll just have a cup of cocoa."

Cocoa! Sally was transfixed.

"Oh, not *cocoa*!" she cried. "Not *cocoa*!" It was a desperate appeal. It came from the depths of her heart. She had been alarmed at his speech. She had been afraid of what he might do. But more than all she was afraid of the horrible voice that had followed fear with its imaginings of the means to her own salvation. At his further silence, she went quickly out of the room and out of the hotel. She walked at a rapid pace along the avenue, where others also were walking, as it was a favourite promenade; and she found herself shaking with emotion as the result of the disclosure which Gaga had made. He knew. He *knew*. What did he know? And what would he do? Sally laughed hysterically. Oh, let him do it *soon*! It was suspense that she could not bear. It was the ghastly sense of muddle and falsehood that was oppressing her now. Death—punishment—these were things of indifference. It was the fear of either that made her torture. To know the worst, to face it, to suffer for all she had done that was wrong, would satisfy her. But to be kept

in this horrible suspense much longer would send her mad. Why had she not told Gaga the truth? She began hysterically to condemn herself. She should have told him the truth. She should have said that Toby was an old lover, jealous, angry, threatening. Now she could not tell any such tale, because she had denied that a man had used her name. To confess would make him disbelieve anything she ever said. Sally shrugged. He did not believe her now. He would never believe her. Once he was well he would find out everything. He would suspect her. He would persecute her with suspicions. He would suspect that she was going to have a baby. He would suspect . . . he would *know* . . .

Creeping, creeping into Sally's mind came temptation. She walked more swiftly until she reached a part of the road which bordered the river. The water was less muddy here. The river looked in this aspect like a big pool of liquid lead. It was less sinister. It carried to her heart no sense of horror. She turned and began to walk back, meeting every now and then a couple of pedestrians, or little knots of people, or solitary individuals like herself, who strolled to and fro along the broad avenue. But it was very dark, and she could not well see the faces of those who passed, except when they were in the neighbourhood of a light. She did not recognise anybody; and when she came once more to the bridge she did not tarry, but walked straight across it. Upon the face of the river were reflected the lights of the hotel, for the balcony was now faintly illumined, and she could see that the curtains had been drawn at the corner windows, although not elsewhere. Again unperceived, she made her way upstairs and into the drawing-room, where she removed her coat and hat and seated herself at the piano.

xxi

But Sally did not stay at the piano. She was restless and apprehensive. She did not dare to strike a note, in case Gaga should be asleep. And she could not go into the bedroom. She tried to do so, but she so shrank from meeting Gaga after their talk that every impulse held her faltering here. Instead, Sally went through the door which led from the drawing-room to the balcony. Only one light was burning, at the farther end, and this cast such a tiny ray that it threw up the shadows of no more than a single enamelled iron table and wicker chair. For the rest, everything was in a monotonous grey twilight, bereft of all incidental colourings and of all significance. The electric bulb was grimed with age and the action of the air, and the light was quite yellow, as that from an oil lamp would have been. The matting with which the floor of the balcony was covered was in shadow. Through the windows Sally could see only a blackness in which the water and the opposite bank and the buildings farther away were all obscured. She went towards the light, and sat here in an armchair, staring straight before her, and thinking the one word . . . poison . . . poison . . . poison.

She must have been sitting upon the balcony for several minutes in this state approaching stupor, when she heard a faint sound. It was like the brushing of leaves against a passing body. Her heart quickened, and she looked quickly towards the darker end of the balcony, near the door leading to the drawing-room. She could see nothing at all, but her nerves did not relax their tenseness. She could see nothing; but she felt that something—somebody was there, watching her. Somebody—whom could it be? Sally knew how deserted the bar was, how easy it would be for a man to slip up the stairs without

being seen. She was defenceless. If she had been well, she would have gone straight along the balcony, to discover the cause of her alarm; but she was ill, and she shrank back in her chair, watching the pulsing dimness.

Sally knew that there were only two people who could wish her harm—Gaga and Toby. If Gaga had gone out of his bedroom by the inner door he might have come round through the drawing-room, and might be standing there in the darkness. He might have gone away again. He might have found the poison. In a passion of fear, she rose. If it was Gaga, she would soon confront him. She would satisfy herself of his presence in the bedroom. She took two steps, and then stopped, her heart frantically beating. There *was* somebody there.

"Sally," came a sharp whisper. "Sally. Don't be afraid."

It was Toby, hidden still from sight, but waiting there at the dark end of the balcony.

xxii

Sally's eyes flew instantly to the window of the bedroom. All there was dark. She could not tell if the blinds were drawn or not. She no longer dreaded Toby: she too violently desired to see him, to be in his arms and saved from her nightmare thoughts by a moment's oblivion.

"Hush!" she whispered, and went silently along the balcony. "What d'you want?"

"I want you." Toby's voice came hissing into her ear, and she saw him at last. He was standing, a burly figure, in the shadow of a screen, and remained quite still, hidden.

"What did you come for? How did you get here?"

"Went to your house. Frightened 'em." Toby laughed

grimly. "Thought you'd got away, didn't you? Well, here I am." His tone became suddenly ferocious. "See?"

"You can't . . . we can't talk. My husband's there—in that room. He'll hear. He saw you last night."

"I got to see you," Toby whispered, obstinately. "See? I mean to say, I got to know what you're going to do."

Sally gave a contemptuous laugh. So he had followed her for that!

"Well, I'm well rid of *you,*" she answered. "I see what *you* are."

"Oh, you do, do you . . ." said Toby. He gripped her arm. "Not so much of that, Sal. D'you see? I won't have it. You belong to me."

"I don't!" But Sally was only waiting for his fierce embrace, and longing for it. "I don't like you. I don't want you. I've had enough. You let me down."

Toby started. His voice became thick with anger.

"My Christ! Who let anybody down? What did you do to me? Eh? You married this chap. You did it for yourself. Let you down, do I? Oh, I'm a good mind to kill you, Sal."

Sally shivered. She knew he might do it. He *could* do it. It was his nature. But she answered him defiantly, sneeringly.

"Yes, if you want to be hung for it."

Toby was holding her so that her arms were being bruised. He pulled her towards him, and kissed her again and again. He was crushing her.

"See?" he said. "That's how you belong to me."

"Well, what about it?" panted Sally. "Let me go. . . . Just because you're strong."

"You're coming off with me. See? Now."

"I'm not." She was equally determined.

"Now. Can you get your hat?"

"I'm not," repeated Sally.

Toby swung her off her feet with one arm.

"See?" he announced again. "That's what."

"Go on, that's all you can do," answered Sally, savagely. "You clear off. I've had enough of it." She dived suddenly, and escaped from him. She was a few steps away, and Toby was in pursuit. As he followed, he kicked against one of the little iron tables, which he had not seen in the half-light, and sent it crashing to the floor. Amid their silence it made a hideous noise. Sally drew herself upright, terrified into rigidity. This was the finish—the finish. It was all over now. She was beaten. She . . . And as she stared she saw that the French window of the bedroom was open—had been open, perhaps, all the time,—and that Gaga was standing there, as if he had overheard all that they had said.

"Sally!" he cried in a sharp voice of alarm. "Oh, my God! Oh, my *God*!"

Gaga came leaping out upon the balcony as Toby stumbled on towards Sally. The two men were sharply in conflict, and Gaga's arm was raised. She could see it even in the shadow—the raised arm, and the impact of the two bodies. Gaga was in his sleeping-suit, spectral in his gauntness and his pallor. Maddened, Toby swept his enemy aside with one violent blow that would have killed the strongest man. Gaga went down, his head and body thrown with great force against the brick wall of the hotel, and sliding to the ground with such momentum that there was a further concussion.

"Toby!" shrieked Sally. "Toby! You've killed him!"

Gaga lay in the shadow, quite motionless, a horrible twisted body without life. And the two others stood panting in the twilight, staring down at his ghastly upturned face. Toby was as if paralysed by the sight, his hand sleepily raised to his brow.

A voice sounded from downstairs.

"Did you call, Mrs. Merrick?" And then ascending steps followed.

Sally made a frantic gesture.

"Get out!" she cried. "Quick. They're coming. They'll find you. He's dead. Get out!" She waved to the windows.

With one glance round, and with fear at his heels, Toby ran to the side of the balcony, pulled aside one of the windows, and climbed out into the darkness. Sally saw him no more. She was only aware that something terrible happened, and that he missed his footing and plunged downwards towards the running water and the sickening mud. Then, as she convulsively jerked the window close again, she was overcome with deadly faintness, and herself fell upon the matting, striking her head as she fell, and losing consciousness.

THE END